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Press Release

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Health Group Calls for a Change in Circumcision Policy

Lawmakers are urged to pass legislation protecting boys from forced circumcision.

SAN DIEGO, California – In a country where change is on everyone's mind, a bill proposal that would require patients to be eighteen years old to consent to circumcision is making its way through Congress and more than a dozen state legislatures. The proposed legislation was drafted by MGMBill.org, a California based health and human rights group.

Matthew Hess, the group's president, argues that boys are being treated unfairly when it comes to circumcision.

"We need to stop discriminating against male infants," said Hess. "When girls are born, they are welcomed into the world peacefully. But for more than half of our nation's boys, life begins with painful and irreversible cosmetic surgery. While I support every man's right to undergo circumcision if he chooses to do so, no child should be forced to have this unnecessary surgery. Ten out of ten babies oppose circumcision – and for good reason."

That's why the Pandians in Clay, New York, refused to circumcise their son, even after being pressured by their former pediatrician.

"When our son was born my wife Anne and I chose to keep him intact," said Murugan Pandian, director of MGMBill.org's New York state office. "We did the research and knew that there would be those who would oppose our decision. But in the end, we came to the conclusion that circumcision is an unnecessary and irreversible surgery that should not be legal to perform on any child, regardless of whether that child is a boy or a girl."

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin, a protective zone of skin and tissue covering the glans of the penis. Thousands of erogenous nerve endings including the ridged band and some or all of the frenulum are destroyed after circumcision, leaving behind a diminished penis capable of sending fewer nerve impulses to the pleasure centers of the brain. After a circumcision is performed, the body tries to replace the protective function of the foreskin by forming keratin around the exposed glans and remaining inner foreskin, causing further interference with sexual sensation.

Trisha Darner, director of MGMBill.org's Oregon state office, is optimistic that U.S. laws will eventually treat boys and girls equally when it comes to circumcision.

"I'm encouraged by what's happening in the courts, and some of the responses that I've received from lawmakers over the past year have been very supportive of our effort," said Darner. "The judiciary is slowly inching toward making forced circumcision a crime, but unfortunately it's not happening quickly enough. That is why I feel it's so important that legislators enact the MGM Bill now, so that boys don't have to keep waiting for the protection they are entitled to under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

The legality of forced circumcision is being challenged now more than ever before. In 2008, the Oregon Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court both let stand a lower court decision that blocked a Jewish convert from having his 12-year old son circumcised until the boy's own wishes are determined, helping to establish a legal precedent. In North Carolina, a Gaston County father was charged with child abuse for circumcising two of his sons with a utility knife. And across the Atlantic in Denmark, lawmakers are now considering a ban on circumcision of male children. The ban is supported by the Ethics Council, the National Council for Children, Social Democrats, the Red-Green Alliance, and the Liberal Alliance.

State legislatures that received MGM Bill proposals yesterday included California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia. A federal version was also submitted to President-elect Barack Obama and to each member of the 111th U.S. Congress.