



March 14, 2022

Council of the District of Columbia Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety  
Via email: [judiciary@dccouncil.us](mailto:judiciary@dccouncil.us)

**Re: Testimony in Support of B24-0516, the “Female Genital Mutilation Prohibition Act of 2021”**

Dear Chairperson Councilmember Charles Allen and Committee Members:

I would like to thank the members of the Judiciary & Public Safety Committee for considering my testimony. My name is Jorie Dugan\_ and I am a Legal Advisor at Equality Now, an international human rights organization working for the promotion and protection of women and girls’ rights everywhere. Established in 1992, Equality Now works to advance human rights through a comprehensive approach to the law through advocacy, litigation, and partnership with grassroots women’s rights groups across the globe. For nearly thirty years, Equality Now has helped inform and guide U.S. policy on female genital mutilation, or FGM, and continues to advocate with FGM survivors for a comprehensive approach to prevent and address FGM in the U.S. and around the world. Equality Now is in strong support of B24-0516 to prohibit FGM in the District of Columbia, including prohibition of vacation cutting, to expand mandated reporting requirements to include female genital mutilation, and to provide for a civil action for female genital mutilation.

Laws are extremely effective in preventing FGM and I hope the Judiciary & Public Safety Committee, along with other District of Columbia legislators, pass this bill in order to protect the human rights of girls and women affected by or at risk of FGM. While B24-0516 provides protections to persons “under care,” everyone ideally should be protected against FGM, so I encourage the legislators to continuing taking all necessary actions to enforce a zero tolerance approach to FGM.

FGM is not only an international concern but a problem in the United States, with severe and long-lasting consequences, affecting girls’ health and physical and emotional well-being. Both nationally and internationally, FGM is recognized as a human rights violation and an extreme form of gender-based violence that can have detrimental and irreparable lifelong health consequences. Survivors of FGM can suffer from chronic infections; severe pain during urination, menstruation, sexual intercourse and childbirth; infertility; psychological trauma; and in some cases, even death. FGM violates women and girls’ human rights to equality, life, security, dignity, and freedom from discrimination and torture. Furthermore, FGM is not only performed in the U.S. but girls in the U.S. are also at risk of “vacation cutting,” where girls are subjected to FGM while on vacation in their parents’ countries of origin. Because it involves the female genitalia, FGM is often shrouded in secrecy or shame. But let us make no mistake; FGM is an extreme form of gender-based violence.

Although there is a federal law against FGM in the United States, it is important to have laws at the District and State levels, where health, child protection, education, law enforcement, social and other services are provided and to train first responders and service providers on the issue and on their responsibilities in implementing the law. This is particularly true in Washington D.C., which has the second highest rate of FGM in the United States, with estimates of more than 51,000 women who have undergone or are at-risk of FGM in the District.<sup>1</sup> Washington D.C. along with only ten states have not adopted any specific law regulating or prohibiting FGM and could be considered a national outlier.<sup>2</sup> It is past time Washington D.C. protects women and girls from this harmful practice.

By not prohibiting FGM, Washington D.C. is unaligned with international human rights standards and laws, including the rights to privacy, liberty and security of person, non-discrimination and the right to be protected from torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the United States has ratified. Furthermore, the United States has signed onto the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for the elimination of female genital mutilation under Goal 5.3.

If passed, the Female Genital Mutilation Prohibition Act will help ensure that girls at risk of undergoing FGM are protected within the District. Specifically, this Act would prohibit “a parent, guardian, or conservator from removing a person under their care from the District for the purpose of facilitating FGM abroad” (vacation cutting); expand “mandated reporter requirements to include suspicion that a person is at imminent risk of being subjected to FGM”; enable a “person under care [to] bring a civil action against a person” for facilitating FGM; and require that “DC Health develop educational training and materials for community members and mandated reports on the harms associated with [FGM] and how to recognize the signs that a person might be at risk.” The legislative changes proposed in B24-0516 will fill gaps left by the current U.S. federal laws and provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to ending FGM by providing education and outreach, putting a ban on taking a girl outside of the state to undergo FGM, and providing survivors the opportunity to stand up for themselves in a court of law, should they choose to do so.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my strong support for the proposed bill, and I ask you, too, to stand up for the girls in Washington D.C and around the world by supporting this bill. We need Washington D.C laws to protect girls from FGM and a law banning this practice will send a strong message both here and abroad that Washington D.C is committed to protecting human rights and preventing violence against girls. I hope the legislature, law enforcement, front line professionals, communities, and girls can stand together and proclaim loudly that it is illegal to perform FGM. We all need to be clear that in this country, and in this jurisdiction, there is no exception for performing FGM and that all girls are protected and their human rights upheld.

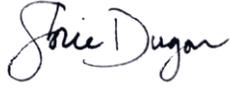
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<sup>1</sup> Mather, Mark, and Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs, Population Reference Bureau. Women and Girls at Risk of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the United States. 5 February 2016 (available at: <https://www.prb.org/resources/women-and-girls-at-risk-of-female-genital-mutilation-cutting-in-theunited-states/>).

<sup>2</sup> Equality Now. US Laws Against FGM, State by State. (available at: [https://www.equalitynow.org/us\\_laws\\_against\\_fgm\\_state\\_by\\_state/](https://www.equalitynow.org/us_laws_against_fgm_state_by_state/))

Thank you again for your time and consideration of this testimony, and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jorie Dugan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jorie Dugan  
Legal Advisor