

Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee  
Wednesday, December 12, 2018  
Senate Bill 214  
Proponent Testimony

My name is Phyllis Carlson-Riehm and I represent ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women. ACTION OHIO is a statewide coalition with a focus on domestic violence, but also including the elimination of gender violence and discrimination. My testimony is in support of Senate Bill 214, which will prohibit the practice of or facilitation of female genital mutilation (FGM).

- SB 214 prohibits any person from knowingly circumcising, excising, or infibulating any part of the labia majora or labia minora or clitoris of another person who is under 18 years old.
- Further, SB 214 prohibits any person from knowingly transporting a minor to a facility or location for the purpose of facilitating such an act.
- A person who violates either of the bill's prohibitions is guilty of female genital mutilation, a fifth degree felony punishable by a term of imprisonment between six and 12 months and a fine of up to \$2,500. And the court may impose an additional fine on an offender of up to \$25,000.

Our nation, including the State of Ohio, has been a destination for immigrants and refugees from many lands – always seeking a better life. When newcomers arrive, they bring their hopes and dreams, as well as their traditions and customs. For the most part, the norms of our country become their norms, but sometimes there is a clash of values when another culture's traditions violate U.S. laws and our social norms. Female Genital Mutilation is one such tradition that is not acceptable for a variety of reasons. In the U.S. as in other modern societies FGM is viewed as a form of the subjugation of females (who make up 50% of the population). Generally it is practiced in cultures dominated and controlled by males.

FGM is not medically necessary and typically it is not performed by a person with any medical training or competence. In countries where the practice is common, FGM is performed on infants, young girls or teen girls, to ensure their virginity until marriage. The procedure also prevents normal sexual pleasure when the female is considered old enough to be married and she is given in marriage, commonly to a much older man of her family's choosing.

The World Health Organization describes health risks of FGM to include short and long-term consequences such as:

- Severe pain, Excessive bleeding, Impaired wound healing, Shock,
- Genital tissue swelling, Chronic infections,
- Risk of HIV when non-medical persons are performing the ritual in unsanitary conditions,
- Urination problems, Menstrual problems, Keloids,
- Perinatal risks, Obstetric complications,
- Psychological consequences, and
- Death.

Although FGM in the U.S. may have seemed remote to most of us in the past, the practice of FGM is emerging as a health and safety issue that needs to be addressed. Some refugee and immigrant families

have chosen to send their young daughters to relatives in their home country to have the procedure done. In other cases FGM has been performed by some doctors associated with refugee or immigrant communities in the U.S.. It is estimated that nearly 100 girls may have had their genitals cut by two doctors in Michigan arrested in April 2017 on three federal criminal counts, including aiding and abetting FGM. We are grateful to Senators Lou Terhar and Peggy Lehner for introducing SB 214 to address this practice in Ohio.

In view of the large number of refugees and immigrants in Ohio who are from many of the countries where FGM has been practiced, it is incredibly important to enact Senate Bill 214 and ensure that female infants and girls living in Ohio are protected from practices that will harm them physically and psychologically, forever impacting their ability to be healthy in body, mind and spirit and to fulfill their full potential as adult women.

I urge Committee members to support passage of SB 214. Thank you for the opportunity to express these views.

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