



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
In support of S.834 An Act relative to female genital mutilation
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts considers female genital mutilation a violation of girls' and women's human rights, and, therefore, urges the passage of S.834 An Act relative to female genital mutilation.

This bill establishes criminal and civil penalties for female genital mutilation (FGM), making it a crime punishable by a fine of \$10,000 and imprisonment. The bill prohibits community or ritual standard as a defense. The bill allows victims of FGM to file a civil action suit regardless of where the action occurred and without parental consent. Minors 13 years of age or older may appear in court without a guardian to request protection from abuse and harassment. Counsel will be appointed in such matters. An education, prevention and outreach program will be established by the Department of Public Health for communities that commonly practice FGM.

There is no developmental or health-related justification for this harmful practice. One of the highest values of Islamic law is to do no harm. FGM poses immediate risk to girls' health, including severe pain and bleeding, difficulty in passing urine, infections and even death due to hemorrhagic or neurogenic shock. The practice often leaves girls with long-term scars as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain, HIV infection, cysts, abscesses, and genital ulcers. There is an increased risk of complications affecting their menstrual cycles, sometimes resulting in infertility.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks Massachusetts 12th in the nation in terms of the number of women and girls who have undergone or are at risk of undergoing FGM. Since 2012, the Massachusetts Women's Bar Association has been advocating for a state law that would protect girls from this practice.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, with 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, asks for your support on this bill that criminalizes abuse of girls and women, provides education and outreach to the communities who practice FGM, and allows for victims to file civil suit for abuse or request protection from abuse or harassment.

Thank you for your consideration.