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Press Release

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Consent Bill Would Make Male Circumcision a Personal Choice

Bill proposals in Congress and 16 states would protect male infants and boys from forced circumcision.

SAN DIEGO, California – Nearly 3,000 federal and state lawmakers received proposed legislation via email, fax, and postal mail this week that would require men to be eighteen years old before undergoing circumcision. The bill proposals were submitted to lawmakers in Congress and sixteen state legislatures by members of MGMbill.org, a San Diego based health and human rights group.

Matthew Hess, the group's president, said that MGMbill.org's proposed legislation is designed to give men control over their own bodies. "Although some men may prefer to be circumcised, there are at least as many men who resent that part of their penis was amputated without their permission. Enactment of the MGM Bill would address this injustice by letting men make their own choices about circumcision when they become adults."

Male circumcision is the only medically unnecessary surgery in the USA that is performed without obtaining consent from the patient. The latest statistics from the National Hospital Discharge Survey indicate that nearly 60% of U.S. newborn males are still being circumcised, down from an estimated high of 85% in the 1960s. Circumcision and genital cutting of girls has been prohibited since 1997 when the U.S. Female Genital Mutilation Act took effect, but that law does not apply to boys.

Charles A. Antonelli, Director of MGMbill.org's Massachusetts state office, said that requiring a patient to give his consent before undergoing circumcision would help quell the growing controversy surrounding the practice. "A consent law would take circumcision out of the gray area," said Antonelli. "Adults would be free to undergo circumcision without restriction, and children would be protected from medically unnecessary circumcision until they reach the age of consent. I don't see why anyone should have a problem with that."

As more activists speak out against circumcision of children, the legal landscape is beginning to shift. In an October ruling, a Cook County, Illinois, circuit court judge presiding over a parental dispute ordered that a 9-year old boy not be circumcised, writing that "the injury to the child as a result of an unnecessary circumcision would be irreversible." A week prior to that decision, a German court ruled in a child ritual circumcision case that male circumcision is only allowed in Germany for medical reasons, and a Finnish court handed down a decision in August declaring that male and female circumcision "are illegal under the same criminal law".

"Recent studies have confirmed that circumcision decreases sexual pleasure for most men," said Trisha Darner, director of MGMbill.org's Oregon state office. "If men can choose circumcision later in life, why should they be subjected to this surgery as infants when they can't give their consent? Men should have the same legal rights that women have when it comes to making decisions about their own bodies."

Arthur Coons, director of MGMbill.org's Washington state office in Snohomish, emphasized that no man would be prevented from having a circumcision if he chooses it for himself. "Men will still be able to undergo circumcision for any reason if the MGM Bill becomes law," said Coons. "Our legislation only requires that the person being circumcised be at least eighteen years old to consent to the procedure. In my opinion, enactment of this law is long overdue".

State legislatures that received MGM Bill proposals included California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. A federal version was also submitted to all 540 members of Congress.