



# AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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December 12, 2018

The Honorable Rep. Nathan Manning  
Chairperson  
House Criminal Justice Committee  
77 S. High Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

**Re: SUPPORT for SB 214, Testimony from American Atheists in support of legislation to prohibit female genital mutilation**

Dear Chairperson Manning and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its over 1,200 constituents in Ohio, writes to provide testimony regarding SB 214, a bill which will protect women and girls in Ohio from harmful practices known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Ohio is one of just 23 states that does not prohibit these dangerous practices. We urge you to swiftly remedy this by passing this critical legislation.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans, American Atheists objects to efforts to subordinate medical care to the religious beliefs of others.

FGM, which is the ritual cutting or alteration of female genitalia for non-medical purposes, is predominately forced upon young females and performed by non-licensed practitioners. SB 214 makes FGM against minors in Ohio a second degree felony and provides for a significant fine, while making it clear that consent of the minor or their parent is not a defense. Moreover, the bill prohibits the transportation of minors for the purpose of undergoing FGM. Finally, the bill exempts the legitimate practice of medicine by licensed physicians.

Although FGM is frequently performed as part of religious tradition in some cultures, these practices have no medical necessity or benefit. Instead, these practices frequently result in serious injury to the victim as well as a host of serious medical complications. In addition to the devastating physical consequences, FGM can result in significant psychological harm. Ohio has a duty to protect its residents from these dangerous practices regardless of tradition. This sort of religiously inspired and brutal misogyny has no place in our society.

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important matter. We urge you to act swiftly to pass SB 214 to protect women and girls in Ohio from FGM. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support of SB 214, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x9 or by email at [agill@atheists.org](mailto:agill@atheists.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AG', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alison Gill, Esq.  
VP, Legal and Policy  
American Atheists

CC: All members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee