



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

January 29, 2018

The Honorable Rep. John M. Mizuno
Chairperson, House Committee on Health
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 402
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: SUPPORT for HB 132, Testimony from American Atheists in support of legislation to prohibit female genital mutilation

Dear Chairperson Mizuno and Members of the House Committee on Health:

American Atheists, on behalf of its constituents in Hawaii, writes to provide testimony regarding HB 132, a bill which will protect women and girls in Hawaii from harmful practices known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Hawaii 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. In addition to establishing a program to raise awareness about the dangers of FGM, HB 132 makes FGM a Class B felony. The bill would also clarify that tradition and consent (whether of a minor or their parent) are not appropriate defenses. 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. Hawaii 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 HB 132 to protect women and girls in Hawaii from FGM. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support of HB 132, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x9 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Sincerely,

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

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

CC: All members of the Hawaii House Committee on Health