



Women's Bar Association

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February 5, 2016

Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Request for action to vote FGM bill (S1116/H1530) favorably out of the Judiciary Committee

Dear Co-Sponsor,

Thank you for your ongoing support and co-sponsorship of "An Act establishing civil and criminal penalties for the female genital mutilation of minors" (S1116/H1530), which had its hearing before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary on December 1, 2015. The Committee heard from victims of FGM and learned of their trauma and feelings of violation as well as from doctors treating survivors' lifelong health problems. Testimony was also submitted in favor of S1116/H1530 by the Attorney General. We were grateful that the over 50 legislative cosponsors on the bill submitted a letter to the Judiciary Chairs in support of the bill.

This week as we mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which takes place on February 6, 2016, we ask you to contact the Judiciary committee by phone, email, or letter, to ask them to vote S1116/H1530 favorably out of committee and bring it to the floor for a vote this session.

Experts agree that current Massachusetts criminal laws are inadequate to protect girls in the Commonwealth from FGM and that explicit laws are required. 24 US states have already passed explicit laws; however, Massachusetts is not one of those states, despite a 2015 study by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), showing Massachusetts ranked 12th in the nation of at-risk populations (Population Reference Bureau, February 2015). In January 2016, The Center for Disease Control announced their study, supporting the PRB statistics.

S1116/H1530 is widely supported in the community. A coalition of 34 organizations have pledged their support for the FGM bill, including the Massachusetts District Attorneys' Association, medical, social services, refugee, immigrant, child advocacy, and women's rights groups.

Last week, a Boston nurse speaking at a briefing, hosted by the Caucus of Women Legislators on S1116/H1530, told of being pinned to the ground "like a criminal" when she was cut as a young woman, resulting in infection and scarring, difficult childbirth and life-long trauma. The witness also vowed, "no girl, I repeat, no girl, should have to undergo FGM." Zero-Tolerance for FGM. Please stand with her and with us as we mark this day and encourage your fellow law makers to vote the bill favorably out of committee, and to pass this important piece of human rights legislation to enable us to begin protecting girls in Massachusetts from this violence.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly Dougherty'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Kimberly Dougherty, President