

Alþingi  
Kirkjustræti  
150 Reykjavík  
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Umsögn um frumvarp til laga um breytingu á almennum hegningarlögum (bann við umskurði drengja), 148. löggjafarþing, 114. mál

### **About me**

Ágæta Alþingi, thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the proposed legislation to ban non-therapeutic circumcision (NTC). Unfortunately, I do not speak Icelandic, so I hope that you can excuse the fact that I am writing to you all in my native language (English). My name is D'Marco J. Anthony, and I am the creator of a gender equality Facebook page called *Equality for Men*. The page focuses primarily on men's issues (such as forced male genital cutting). It also embraces intersectionality, so women's issues and issues affecting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual communities (LGBTQIA) are also addressed. My page has over 1.000 likes, 5 of which are from people that live in Iceland. I also have a Twitter version of the page with almost 500 followers. I have publicly argued against NTC, and even received an award and a prize of \$100 USD for an essay I wrote about the ethics regarding circumcision, which I submitted to an essay competition at my university.

I was born in the United States of America, and I, like many American males, was circumcised shortly after birth. One of the main reasons why I hate that circumcision was forced on me as a minor is that the foreskin has highly sensitive fine touch nerves which play an important role in sexual and masturbatory function.<sup>1</sup> Circumcised men are never able to experience these nerves once they are amputated. Even if there are some significant benefits to circumcision, there is no way that one can remove the foreskin and have the penis function the exact same way that nature intended it to function. I am not exaggerating when I say that for several years I have spent everyday thinking about how much I resent the fact that I was circumcised against my will.

### **Gender Equality**

My understanding is that the proposed legislation would *not* protect intersex people. As a result, I hope you will consider banning *all* non-therapeutic genital cutting, which would protect every single child regardless of gender. Adding protections for intersex people would not be unprecedented, especially since Malta has already banned Intersex Genital Cutting (IGC) when there is no immediate medical reason to do so. Furthermore, the Council of Europe, which Iceland is a member of, has urged all member states to take action and protect female, intersex, and male children from

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<sup>1</sup> Non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors - KNMG Viewpoint.

genital alterations because they are not medically necessary.<sup>2</sup> Circumcision is a gender equality issue, especially when you consider what the Royal Dutch Medical Association (KNMG) has to say on the matter. They point out that removing the male prepuce (foreskin) is akin to removing the female prepuce (clitoral hood). Biological sex is not a binary, it is a spectrum between females, males, and somewhere in between (intersex people). At what point should a prepuce be considered a male foreskin rather than a female clitoral hood? Wherever you draw the line, the cutoff point could be considered arbitrary. It seems much more practical to shut down any and all unnecessary genital alterations of the prepuce and otherwise. In fact, the KNMG even argues that there are milder forms of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) which involve “pricking” the clitoral hood without actually removing any tissue. How can any country justify banning a mild “prick” of the prepuce in females without also banning the more severe act of removing the entire prepuce in males?<sup>3</sup> And why should Iceland or any country continue to allow IGC to be legal when it is often as severe or even more severe than FGC? Many intersex people undergo a procedure akin to a cliterectomy (complete amputation of the clitoris) when they are circumcised.<sup>4</sup>

### **Medical effects**

While the medical benefits and drawbacks of circumcision are widely debated, it is important to keep in mind that many European medical professionals and organizations have argued that forcing genital cutting on minors is not medically justified and can even be deemed as being harmful. They also argue that the foreskin has important functions. Many of these medical professionals against NTC happen to live in Iceland. Since circumcision is usually performed without anesthetic, it is often quite painful. Furthermore, there are physical, psychological, and sexual adverse effects including post-traumatic stress disorder. And many circumcised men feel like they have been violated, mutilated, and sexually assaulted.<sup>5</sup> While some people think circumcision provides hygienic benefits, it actually deprives men of important hygienic functions. The foreskin protects the head of the penis (glans) from feces and ammonia when infants wear diapers. The foreskin also protects the glans from abrasions and trauma, and it helps prevent tight erections.<sup>6</sup> Meatal stenosis, which rarely occurs in intact (uncircumcised) men, was observed in 5%-20% of circumcised men in a recent study.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe Resolution 1952 (2013): Children’s right to physical integrity

<sup>3</sup> Non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors - KNMG Viewpoint.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/crcl/vol40\\_1/ehrenreich.pdf](http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/crcl/vol40_1/ehrenreich.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22114254>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22924249>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28017691>

Even medical organizations outside of Europe are aware that the medical benefits of circumcision are extremely minimal. Circumcision for penile cancer and urinary tract infection (UTI) prevention purposes are ineffective and possibly even obsolete. The number of circumcisions required to prevent a single UTI is 140; 195 circumcisions prevent a single hospitalization due to UTIs. But it is important to keep in mind that UTIs are relatively uncommon. Penile cancer is a rare disease and about 300.000 circumcisions would be needed to prevent a single penile cancer case. Consequently, an individual is way more likely to encounter a circumcision complication than receive a penile cancer prevention benefit from circumcision. It is also important to consider that one-third of penile cancer cases result from the human papilloma virus (HPV), which can easily be prevented through vaccination alone and makes circumcision even more obsolete. Minor circumcision complications include bleeding (0,8-1,8 per 1.000 circumcisions), infection (3 per 5.000 circumcisions), and injury to the penis (1 per 2.500 circumcisions). There are also more severe complications that can occur due to circumcision.<sup>8</sup> One estimate claims that 1 circumcision complication occurs for every 476 circumcisions.<sup>9</sup> There is insufficient evidence to suggest that neonatal circumcision prevents HIV in developed countries such as Iceland,<sup>10</sup> especially since the studies that suggest such a benefit were done on *adults* circumcised in Africa.<sup>11</sup> So basically, most people that are circumcised do not receive *any* UTI, penile cancer, or HIV prevention benefits.

### **Religious freedom**

Everyone should have the right to choose whether or not they would like to adhere to a religion. Circumcising a child for religious reasons violates that child's religious freedoms. Circumcision is an irreversible procedure which *always* leaves a scar around the penis. This essentially means that circumcision can be viewed as a form of religious branding. Religious circumcisions forced on minors ensure that even if a child decides not to practice a religion that favors circumcision when they grow up, their genitals will be permanently altered. The metzitzah b'peh ritual is a religious practice which involves oral suction of blood from the circumcision wound. Babies often contract Herpes due to this ritual and sometimes even die because of it.<sup>12</sup> Children should be entitled to genital integrity and religious freedom, and circumcision for religious reasons deprives children of both rights.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/neonatal-circumcision.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2788411/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20844437>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/neonatal-circumcision.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2013/04/07/health/new-york-neonatal-herpes/index.html>

### **Leading the fight**

Is it possible that Iceland will face backlash for protecting minors from harmful genital cutting? Yes, of course, but it is normal for backlash to occur when a country becomes the first to enact landmark human rights protections (in this case genital autonomy for boys [and hopefully intersex children as well]). Being on the right side of history is better for Iceland in the long run, and it also has the potential to be a catalyst for similar protections being enacted elsewhere. On top of protecting the children of Iceland from genital cutting, this legislation would send a message to the world that genital integrity and basic human rights should be upheld. Furthermore, many men that despise having been forcibly circumcised would gain a lot of the dignity they lost when they found out that the harm done to them is universally accepted under the law. Circumcision should be an informed choice that an individual makes after weighing the benefits and risks of the procedure. Parents should not be able to deprive their children of this important personal and private choice. I hope that Iceland will become the first country in the world to ban male non-therapeutic circumcision of minors and the second to ban intersex non-therapeutic circumcision of minors.

Sincerely,  
D'Marco J. Anthony