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Testimony to the Maryland Senate Finance Committee
In support of SB907: Public Health - Female Genital Mutilation Legislation
Date: March 10, 2026
Submitted by: Aleisa Myles, PsyD

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Hayes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am a licensed clinical psychologist. I was born in the United States. I grew up in Maryland. I am a survivor of female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) that took place when I was a child and that was done on a brief trip out of the country. My name is Aleisa Myles, and I have lived with the consequences and repercussions of what happened for the rest of my life.

I was once a child who did not know that there is any such thing as FGM/C. I was born to parents who participate in a Muslim sect known as the Dawoodi Bohras - a group known for carrying out FGM/C. But it was never spoken about, not at home and not when I was taken to gatherings of the religious group. I did not know that adults kept this practice secret and hidden.

While I was going to kindergarten and 1st grade, I did not know yet that my family members were looking for somewhere to take me to have this done to me. There was no law prohibiting it at the time. First, the licensed pediatrician who was my doctor at the time was asked. He said that he did not offer this procedure but did not say anything to deter the search. Then another Maryland doctor was asked, through a family connection, and it was conveyed that although he may have performed FGM/C in the past he did not still offer this to parents seeking to have it done to their child. None of this was ever mentioned to me as a child. I have learned it only recently, well into my adulthood, through direct conversation with family.

After I had just finished 1st grade, I was taken on a trip to Pakistan. That summer, something horrible happened that made me never want to go back there. It was something I did not understand and for which I did not have any words. It was something I did not ask for and that was not explained to me even during or after it happened - something I would never allow to be done to me or any human being if I had any choice in the matter. But I was 6 years old.

I was then brought back home to Maryland, my body altered without my permission. Through the rest of my years in elementary and middle school, and even while I attended one of the largest public high schools in Maryland I never learned about what happened to me. When I went to college, out of state, I found out about FGM/C in a psychology book I picked up at a bookstore. Then I remembered being 6 years old and being in Pakistan. I insistently asked questions and a family member who was there at the scene where it took place confirmed that it really did happen to me.

I remembered being far away from home. When it happened I did not know where I was or how to find my way to any place I knew for safety. I have not been able to talk about this openly until well into adulthood.

I experienced many of the typical symptoms of post-traumatic stress and began seeking out therapy in my teenage years. Many therapists themselves were uninformed and unprepared to address FGM/C. During college when I went to see the only clinical psychologist on campus, he told me that he was not trained to help with this issue and that perhaps when I went to graduate school I could find someone to

help me. He never spoke with me about it again. After decades of therapy, much of which I paid for out of pocket, I finally found some help with this trauma around the age of 40. I live now in Pennsylvania and in my work as a psychologist I often work with survivors of severe trauma.

The legislation you now have the potential to pass can make a difference by advancing protections and supports for Maryland's children and for some of the survivors who have already endured this violation of their human rights. If this legislation had existed when I was a child, and if the public education and awareness and access to support had been available to me when I was younger, my entire life could have been different and full of much less suffering.

Thank you for the work that you do and for your consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully,
Aleisa Myles, PsyD