

Djessou Kouyate Testimony

Testimony in Support of Strengthening Protections Against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in Maryland

My name is Djessou Kouyate, and I am the Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee USA, an organization established in 2006 to raise awareness and educate American and diaspora communities about harmful traditional practices, particularly Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), which severely impacts the lives of women and children.

I would like to share a brief but heartbreaking story about what is often called “vacation cutting,” which highlights the urgent need for stronger protections.

A mother living in Maryland traveled with her two daughters to visit family in her home country. While she briefly left the girls with relatives to visit her elderly grandparents in a rural town, family members forced FGM on one of the children because she had not undergone the procedure. The young girl suffered severe bleeding and tragically lost her life.

This story reminds us that girls are especially vulnerable during school breaks, when many families travel abroad.

Why Summer Camps?

Evidence shows that many harmful practices, including FGM/C, occur during summer school breaks. Summer camps can provide a safe space to educate children, parents, and community leaders about cultural traditions while also teaching strategies to prevent FGM/C. These camps can also help identify the challenges families face and develop recommendations for stronger protection measures.

Now is the time to strengthen Maryland's laws and send a clear message that we will protect our women and girls and prevent tragedies like this from happening again. Passing this bill will help save lives.

Thank you.