

March 6, 2026

Maryland House of Representatives
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 100
6 Bladen St, Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for HB 1389 - 2025-26

Dear Maryland House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing today to express my strong support for **HB 1389: Public Health -Female Genital Mutilation**. I urge you to **vote favorably** on this crucial piece of legislation.

I am writing as a Maryland resident and advocate who has spent the past decade working with survivors of Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C) and the providers who treat these survivors in the state of Maryland. In my capacity as a public health researcher, I worked on the Federal Legislation, the STOP FGM ACT of 2020 and know the power that is instilled when a state decides to stand up and serve in the role of protector for its citizens.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a severe form of child abuse and gender-based violence that results in devastating, lifelong physical and psychological consequences for survivors. These consequences can include chronic pain, recurrent infections, complications in childbirth, and severe psychological trauma.

Did you know that the DMV region has the second-highest prevalence in the United States and more than 25,000 women and girls in Maryland have experienced or are at risk of FGM/C? Globally, over 230 million women and girls have been subjected to FGM/C—which is defined as the *partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons*. This is a human rights violation and a severe form of gender-based violence—one Maryland led the efforts and first addressed in 1998.

But Maryland's law is now outdated. This bill strengthens prevention and response measures and would explicitly recognize FGM/C as a form of abuse to ensure mandatory reporting and provide survivors with the same services and protections available to survivors of other forms of abuse. HB 1389 will help ensure this occurs.

HB 1389 will expand the definition of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), prohibit vacation cutting, mandate community education and outreach, and provide the right to civil action in Maryland. As members of the House Judiciary Committee, I am requesting that you vote the bill favorably out of committee and urge House and Senate Leadership to bring the bills to their respective chambers for a vote.

Although there is a state law prohibiting FGM/C in Maryland, HB 1389 is a necessary and urgent addition to the current law as it will ensure the state has comprehensive, holistic legislation that addresses FGM/C and responds to the needs of survivors and impacted communities. HB 1389 will build on the 1998 law by:

- Updating the **definition of FGM/C** to align with the World Health Organization and explicitly classify it as a form of abuse.
- Including a **vacation cutting** provision to prohibit transporting girls out of state for FGM/C.
- Implementing **community education** and outreach programs to raise awareness about FGM/C and available survivor services.
- Establishing a **civil action mechanism**, allowing survivors to seek damages and protective remedies to support their healing and recovery.

I fully support this bill and respectfully urge you to immediately take the necessary steps to pass HB 1389. Maryland lawmakers have an important opportunity to protect girls, support survivors, and close critical gaps in the state's response to FGM/C.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical public health and human rights issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen A McDonnell", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen A McDonnell, PhD
Associate Professor-Tenured