



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on May 23, 2011

San Francisco Considers Ban on Circumcision

San Francisco, California, is a city known for being a bastion of all things progressive, secular, countercultural and counter-traditional. Ever since the Hippie Movement of the 1960s took root in the city, various liberal policies have been enacted, including some of America's first laws pandering to the homosexual community (hate crimes legislation, "non-discrimination" policies, etc.), abortion advocates (such as laws imposing heavy fines on pro-lifers who protest outside clinics), and even laws pandering to the animal rights and public health lobbies (such as policies restricting fast food restaurants from marketing to children).



The progressive agenda, however, can once again be fulfilled at the expense of the First Amendment, as a proposal to ban circumcision of male children has been cleared to appear on the November ballot, setting the stage for the nation's first public vote that can potentially ban a medical procedure with great religious and personal value to many Americans. Elections officials confirmed Wednesday the initiative had qualified for the ballot with more than 7,700 valid signatures from city residents. Initiatives must have at least 7,168 names to qualify. If the measure passes, circumcision would be prohibited among males under the age of 18. The practice would become a misdemeanor offense punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 or up to one year in jail. There would be no religious exemptions.

The initiative's backers say its progress is the biggest success story to date in a decades-old, nationwide movement by so-called "intactivists" to end circumcision of male infants in the United States. A similar effort by the Tarrytown, New York-based group Intact America to introduce a circumcision ban in the Massachusetts Legislature last year gained no traction, as activists in Massachusetts garnered no support from legislators for their bill, which was authored in February 2010 by anti-circumcision activist Charles A. Antonelli.

Supporters of the ban in San Francisco say male circumcision is a form of genital mutilation that is unnecessary, extremely painful and even dangerous. Supporters also say that parents should not be able to force the decision on their young child, but yet their ballot proposal allows for possible exemptions in case of "medical emergencies."

"Parents are really guardians, and guardians have to do what's in the best interest of the child. It's his body. It's his choice," said [Lloyd Schofield](#), the measure's lead proponent and a longtime San Francisco resident. He added that in his opinion, the cutting away of the foreskin from the penis is a more invasive medical procedure than many new parents or childless individuals realize. Schofield also said that the measure would amend San Francisco's police code "to make it a misdemeanor to circumcise, excise, cut or mutilate the foreskin, testicles or penis of another person who has not attained the age of 18."

Schofield's logic, however, falls flat when one scrutinizes his claim that parents should be punished for



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exposing their children to risk; if this were consistently applied, than it should also be illegal for parents to cut their children's hair, or let them ride in cars or on bicycles, as these are all potentially risky activities.

The movement rearing its head in San Francisco is part of a larger campaign throughout the United States and Europe attempting to criminalize the practice of circumcision. While there is ample [medical evidence](#) that circumcision is linked to lower rates of penile cancer, thrush infections, balanitis (inflammation of the glans), posthitis and phimosis (two other severe inflammatory conditions), sexual dysfunction, and a reduction in HIV/AIDS and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV, which is linked to sexually-transmitted cervical cancer) transmission rates (in African and other developing societies) as well as improved hygiene, anti-circumcision activists argue that the circumcision of minors ought to be outlawed because a child cannot make a conscious decision as to whether or not they can consent to such a procedure.

Yet, this is a position that reeks of [hypocrisy](#), as the same anti-circumcision individuals often support a pro-choice position on abortion, arbitrarily defending a born child's supposed "right" not be circumcised, while supporting the "right" of an individual parent to legally kill their unborn children as late as 36 weeks of pregnancy (approximately nine months of gestation). In fact, San Francisco's permissive culture has been warmly embracing of several abortionists and even late-term abortion practitioners: According to attorney Leonard Moscowitz, "It is amazing that in San Francisco, you can abort a 5, 6, or 7 month old baby, but you soon may not perform a circumcision on a 9 month, 8 day-old baby."

It is also unsurprising that the same anti-circumcision forces, who argue against the procedure's legality on the basis that parents do not have the right to make informed medical decisions for their children, simultaneously oppose Parental Consent and Parental Notification laws, which require minors to notify or obtain permission from their parents prior to undergoing abortions, which unlike circumcision, entail a host of potential oncological, gynecological, psychiatric, and psychosocial [risk factors](#). Most ironic, perhaps, is the fact that those who claim to be "pro-choice" when it comes to abortion are not pro-choice when it comes to any other consumer or medical decisions, as evident in their success in San Francisco in cracking down on fast food, the individual's choice to not wear a seatbelt, and now, circumcision.

The anti-circumcision movement also has strong roots in Soviet tyranny. Circumcision for religious purposes was banned in the Soviet Union in 1924, just as is currently being proposed in San Francisco. In their effort to obliterate all traditional religious observance, the [Soviet NKVD](#) (and later, the KGB), would arrest and put on trial those religious Jews who chose to have their sons circumcised on the eighth day after birth, in accordance with the Jewish understanding of [Genesis 17: 9-14](#), where Abraham was commanded by God to circumcise himself, his son Ishmael, and the men of Israel. The Soviets, of course, also outlawed infant baptism, which, like circumcision, is a religious initiatory ritual, on the grounds that it is "abusive" for parents to "impose" their religious beliefs on their non-consenting children. Under these extreme totalitarian "nanny state" conditions, those who practiced circumcision were subject to torture and forced labor in the Siberian gulags, just as under the San Francisco ballot proposal, parents who [choose to practice](#) their faith would be subject to years of imprisonment, loss of their children to the clutches of the state, and/or heavy fines.

The San Francisco ballot proposal is, therefore, not only an egregious offense against America's Judeo-Christian roots and an effort to further disenfranchise parents, but also a classic example of a



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governmental [violation of the First Amendment](#), which allows individuals to practice their religious traditions as they see fit. This quest to interfere with the parent-child relationship and the religious practices of countless Jews, Muslims, and others represents an unprecedented assault on Americans' freedom of religion, one which would be unlikely to hold up in federal court, should the ban be challenged on the grounds of religious freedom, which is expected in the event that voters approve the ban when it comes up on the ballot in the November 2011 elections.



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