

I'm glad the Vermont legislature is discussing this important topic.

In my practice I see many women who experienced female circumcision as children before moving to the United States. This results in considerable difficulty in childbirth and putting the women at greater risk of obstetrical complications. It is important to ban this practice because, while most members of the Somali community in Vermont recognize the dangers of female circumcision, there are those who continue to view it as an important cultural practice. While it is an illegal practice based on federal law, that law is not enforceable due to a Supreme Court decision related to the interstate commerce clause. Thus, states must outlaw the practice to prevent individuals from traveling with their children in order to engage in the ritual. I fully recognize the importance of cultural differences, and I respect the Somali community deeply. In recognizing the power of cultural norms and ritual practices, I believe it is exceedingly important for us (as a state and also for the medical community of which I am part) to emphasize that this particular practice is deeply harmful to girls and women. There is no potential benefit to female circumcision and a considerable amount of actual and potential harm.

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