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SF Religious Groups Oppose Proposed Ban On Circumcision

Posted: 5:29 pm PDT April 28, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- A proposal to criminalize male circumcision in San Francisco was submitted to the city this week with enough signatures to put the ban on the ballot for the November election, but local religious groups said Thursday they plan to strongly oppose the initiative.

Lloyd Schofield, who has organized a campaign to ban circumcision in San Francisco, submitted 12,265 signatures to the city's Department of Elections on Tuesday, exceeding by more than 5,000 the amount necessary to put the initiative on the November ballot.

Schofield said he believes male circumcision is wrong, and likened it to female circumcision practices that are already banned in the U.S.

The proposal would punish people who circumcise a minor with a fine of up to \$1,000 or up to a year in jail. The elections department has 30 days to decide whether to certify the initiative and put it on the ballot.

Schofield said Thursday that he is happy that his proposal is sparking a conversation around the city and nationwide, with media outlets across the country picking up the story.

"It's been a taboo subject ... and if you can't talk about something, there is something wrong," he said.

Religious groups such as the San Francisco Interfaith Council and the Jewish Community Relations Council say they will push back strongly against the proposal, which they say impinges on their rights to religious freedom.

"We view it as an attack on religion in general," said Michael Pappas, executive director of the interfaith council.

Abby Porth, associate director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, said the groups will take a multi-pronged approach in opposition to the proposal, including seeking legal recourse and organizing a broad coalition of community members.

"The proposed initiative raises very significant constitutional legal issues," Porth said.

Schofield said that the U.S. Constitution already does not allow for all kinds of religious freedoms when it comes to the care of a child.

"You can do anything with your own body as long as it doesn't affect anything else ... but the religious experience stops at someone else's body," he said.

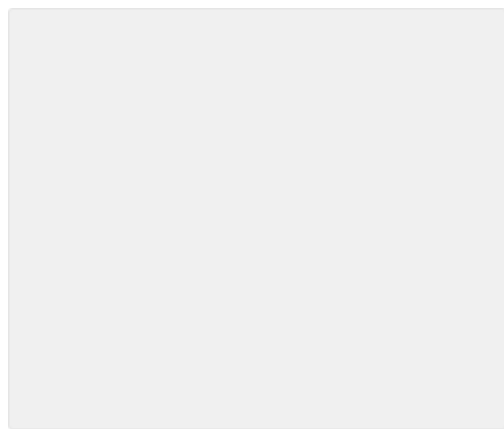
Porth said she is confident that if the initiative makes it on the ballot, the city's voters will reject it.

"They would view it as turning back the clock on religious freedom," she said. "It's directly at odds with San Francisco's tolerant culture."

Schofield said, though, that "we wouldn't be doing this if there wasn't a great deal of support from Jewish people" and the community at large.

"I hope that people take a deep breath, step back and look at the facts," he said.

More information about the initiative is available at www.sfmgbill.org.



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