

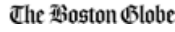


Local Search Site Search

HOME	TODAY'S	NEWS	YOUR TOWN	BUSINESS	SPORTS	LIFESTYLE	A&E	THINGS TO	TRAVEL	CARS	JOBS	REAL ESTATE
Metro	Nation	World	Globe Business	Globe Sports	G	Opinion	Obituaries	Regional editions	Ideas	Magazine	Photography	Classifieds

HOME / GLOBE / OPINION / OP-ED

JEFF JACOBY



# A ban on circumcision?

By Jeff Jacoby

Globe Columnist / May 25, 2011

E-mail | Print | Reprints | Comments (378)

Text size - +

ON THE ballot in San Francisco this fall will be a proposal **making it a crime to circumcise male children**. If the measure passes, anyone convicted of circumcising a baby boy could be fined up to \$1,000 and sentenced to a year in prison. Even for San Francisco, this is madness.

Like 177 likes. Sign Up to see what your friends

Tweet

ShareThis

According to the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, US hospitals perform the procedure **more than 1.2 million times** each year. While circumcision rates have **declined** in recent years, **the great majority of American men are circumcised**. And in nearly every case,

the decision was made for them in their infancy by their parents — just like the decision to breastfeed or bottle-feed, or to use cloth or disposable diapers. Even in **the most childless major city** in America, it's hard to see voters approving what would be an egregious infringement on parental rights.

The health benefits of circumcision are clear, if modest. The **Mayo Clinic website** reflects the medical consensus, noting that circumcised men and boys generally have a lower risk of urinary tract infections, penile cancer, and sexually transmitted diseases, and that circumcision makes genital hygiene easier. At the same time, Mayo endorses **the view of the American Academy of Pediatrics**, which doesn't consider the advantages of circumcision compelling enough to recommend that infant boys be circumcised as a matter of routine. The academy's bottom line is commonsensical: "Because circumcision is not essential to a child's health, parents should choose what is best for their child by looking at the benefits and risks."

In short, circumcision is something about which reasonable people can disagree. But there is nothing reasonable about the fanatics trying to make it a crime.

The ballot campaign in San Francisco is being spearheaded by a group of self-described "intactivists," political crusaders obsessed with the preservation of foreskins. Their mania might be laughable if not for two things: (1) they hijack terminology used to describe a dreadful type of violence against girls and women, and (2) they are attempting to criminalize a fundamental rite of Judaism.

Promoters of the San Francisco initiative call it the **"MGM bill."** The initials stand for "male genital mutilation," a dishonest phrase meant to link the safe and medically unobjectionable procedure of male circumcision with the

Follow Jeff Jacoby on Facebook



Like 400 likes. Sign Up to see what your friends like.

@Jeff\_Jacoby on Twitter | RSS feed

ADVERTISEMENT

**ONE GREAT SALE YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS**

**TAKE 45% OFF ANY ONE PIECE OF FURNITURE\* LIMITED TIME ONLY!**

**LAST CHANCE TO BUY STICKLEY AT 2010 SALE PRICING!**

ANNUAL PRICE INCREASE GOES INTO EFFECT ON JUNE 6TH.

\*Discount is off manufacturer's suggested retail pricing. Offer cannot be combined with any other discount or promotion. Not all furniture brands are eligible for 45% discount. Previous purchases are excluded. Only in-stock accessories are eligible for 45% discount. See showroom for complete details.

## INSIDE BOSTON.COM

YOUR BRUINS PRIDE PHOTOS



Share your display of affection for the Black-

frightful cruelty of female genital mutilation.

The two are not remotely comparable. "Female genital mutilation has no known health benefits," the World Health Organization and nine other international organizations stressed in a 2008 report on the scourge, which persists in much of Africa and the Middle East. "On the contrary, it is known to be harmful to girls and women in many ways." It is painful and traumatic; it makes childbearing "significantly" more risky; and it leads to higher rates of post-partum hemorrhaging and infant death.

By contrast, the WHO report emphasizes, "male circumcision has significant health benefits that outweigh the very low risk of complications." Of particular importance in regions ravaged by AIDS, "circumcision has been shown to lower men's risk for HIV acquisition by about 60 percent." Precisely because circumcision is benign, WHO and the other agencies are at pains to distinguish it from female mutilation, which is always dangerous.

Dangerous in quite a different way is the San Francisco initiative's assault on Jewish religious liberty. Circumcision is the oldest practice of the world's oldest religion. Irrespective of any medical value, it is the sign in the flesh that for nearly 4,000 years has marked Jewish males as heirs to the ancient pact between Abraham and God. Many Muslims also circumcise their sons for religious reasons.

But the law proposed by the "intactivists" radiates hostility to traditional religious belief: "No account shall be taken of the effect on the person on whom the operation is to be performed of any belief on the part of that or any other person that the operation is required as a matter of custom or ritual."

The campaign for a law banning the most enduring obligation in Jewish experience amounts to what the American Jewish Committee calls a "direct assault on Jewish religious practice in the United States . . . unprecedented in American Jewish life."

Fortunately, even in California, most ballot issues are rejected. When San Franciscans vote this fall, the disgraceful anti-circumcision initiative deserves a decisive defeat.

Jeff Jacoby can be reached at [jacoby@globe.com](mailto:jacoby@globe.com). ■

© Copyright 2011 Globe Newspaper Company.



Start your week off right with in-depth coverage. [Subscribe now to the Globe.](#)



READER COMMENTS »

[View reader comments \(378\)](#) » [Comment on this story](#) »

and-Gold

'AMERICAN IDOL' FINALE



Lauren or Scotty? Which singer will win Season 11 tonight?

MIT'S FAMOUS ALUMNI



On MIT's 150th anniversary, a look at its famous alumni

HUB'S ROOF DECKS, BARS



A look at the lofty roof decks and bars around Boston

PLUS...

- [Blogs](#) | [Crossword](#) | [Comics](#)
- [Horoscopes](#) | [Games](#)
- [Lottery](#) | [Caption contest](#)
- [Today in history](#)

### MOST E-MAILED »

1. [Ginger-soy glazed salmon fillets](#)
2. [Grubwithus, gathering strangers around restaurant tables, launches in Boston next week](#)
3. [IdeaPaint is now available at Lowe's nationwide](#)
4. [Why MIT matters](#)
5. [Grilled pork tenderloins with pineapple salsa](#)
6. [Two-way player](#)
7. [New England Xpo for Business highlights](#)

### RECOMMENDED SEARCHES

- [Comics](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Sudoku](#)
- [Horoscope](#)
- [Crossword puzzle](#)

[ABOUT THIS LIST](#) ▶

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Updated Privacy Policy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Sitemap](#)

[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [The Boston Globe Extras](#) | [The Boston Globe Gallery](#) | © 2011 NY Times Co.

