

# Washington State introduces new law to protect women and girls from female genital mutilation or cutting

*The new law was drafted with input from survivors of FGM/C and takes a progressive approach to community education and accountability.*

OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES, April 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new bill to

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*Absa Samba*

protect women and children from female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) has been signed into law by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee. The landmark move is being celebrated by FGM/C survivors and women's rights campaigners, who have been working with lawmakers on introducing legislation to help end this harmful practice.

Bill SSB 5453, which went into effect on April 20, 2023,

prohibits people including health care practitioners from performing FGM/C on girls under 18, provides care for survivors and their families, and gives survivors the right to take private civil action against perpetrators. It also makes provisions for community-wide education about the harms of FGM/C and the new law, including targeting first responders with awareness raising about responsibilities and implementation.

Enacting legislation against FGM/C has received broad community support, partly because it will help those at risk and their families to resist strong cultural and social pressures pushing for the continuation of the practice. It will also be an important deterrent as people are less likely to act when they know there are legal consequences.

## FGM/C in the United States

FGM/C is a harmful traditional practice that involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It has no health benefits and can cause a range of long-term psychological and physical health problems, including severe pain and infection, emotional trauma, sexual dysfunction, reproductive health issues, and in some cases, death.

A form of child abuse and discrimination against women and girls, FGM/C is deeply rooted in gender inequality and is recognized by the United Nations and World Health Organization as a grave human rights violation.

Around 513,000 women and girls are estimated to have undergone or be at risk of FGM/C in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Washington State, the Population Reference Bureau says 25,000 women and girls are at risk of or have undergone the practice.

It is a federal crime to perform FGM/C in the US or take a girl out of the country for the purpose of undergoing it. But states have a significantly greater capacity to reach girls at risk and intervene to provide protection and support.



Members of the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C stand together to call for effective legislation prohibiting FGM/C

State laws are crucial because they govern the activities of state-run institutions, including law enforcement and courts, healthcare, social services, and other programs. As such, they have a more direct impact on the day-to-day lives of people in their jurisdiction.

Washington State new law against FGM/C

Bill SSB5453 was introduced by Washington State Senator Keiser with the support of a range of organizations and was passed unanimously by the Senate on March 1, 2023.

The bill was drafted with significant input from survivors and members of the [Washington Coalition to End FGM/C](#). Alongside [Equality Now](#), [Sahiyo](#), and [The U.S. End FGM/C Network](#), which have also been advocating for legal change, the trio anticipate the new legislation will be extremely effective in preventing FGM/C at the state level.

FGM/C is now a crime in Washington state, and there is a ten-year statute of limitations from the date the crime occurs, or if the victim was a minor, until the victim turns 28. For victims who are minors, it gives them a civil right of action and allows them to file a suit for damages against the person who committed FGM/C.

In addition, it makes health care practitioners accountable by classifying FGM/C as

unprofessional conduct resulting in penalties including fines and loss of license.

An important aspect of the law is the education and awareness-raising component, which is directed at both the public and frontline professionals, including those in the health and education sectors.

The idea for the bill was put forward by Absa Samba, an FGM/C survivor and founder of the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C.

"The passing of Bill SSB 5453 in Washington State is a significant achievement for the movement to end FGM/C. With community-wide education and accountability for healthcare practitioners who carry out FGM/C, survivors and advocates in Washington State have demonstrated their commitment to ending this harmful practice and protecting women and girls' rights," Samba said.

"We hope that this legislation will inspire other states to follow in Washington's footsteps and take action to end FGM/C once and for all," she added.

Nine states still do not have specific legislation prohibiting FGM/C

Washington State is the 41st state to pass a law prohibiting FGM/C, joining others including California, Michigan, and New York.

Girls must be protected from child abuse and violence, including FGM/C, in every state and front line professionals need to be empowered to protect girls.

However, nine states are still lacking clear laws. Campaigners who advocated for Washington's new law are calling on state and district level legislators in Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Washington DC to follow Washington State's lead by passing legal provisions to explicitly ban FGM/C.

Jill Thompson, Regional Representative at Equality Now added, "We recognize and thank the courageous women who testified in support of the bill. Like so many crimes against women, FGM usually happens in secret and is rarely prosecuted.

"We need to get the word out that FGM is happening here, in the United States, in a wider range of communities than most people know, and we need to educate and empower girls, and their families, to say 'No'."

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About Equality Now: Founded in 1992, Equality Now is an international human rights organization that works to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls around the world. Our campaigns are centered on four program areas: Legal Equality, End Sexual Violence, End Harmful Practices, and End Sexual Exploitation, with a cross-cutting focus on the unique needs of adolescent girls. Equality Now combines grassroots activism with international, regional, and national legal advocacy to achieve legal and systemic change to benefit all women and girls and works to ensure that governments enact and enforce laws and policies that uphold their rights.

For more details go to [www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org), Facebook @equalitynoworg, LinkedIn Equality Now, and Twitter @equalitynow.

About Sahiyo: Our mission is to empower Asian and other communities to end female genital cutting and create positive social change through dialogue, education, and collaboration based on community involvement. We use collaborative grassroots campaigns and storytelling techniques to train members FGC practicing communities to lead in demanding widespread abandonment, work with frontline professionals (i.e., healthcare providers) to create culturally sensitive systems of care for survivors, and partner with government officials to address policy level change.

For more details go to <https://sahiyo.org/>, social media: @sahiyovoices

About The U.S. End FGM/C Network: The U.S. End FGM/C Network (“the Network”) is a collaborative group of over 200 survivors, civil society organizations, foundations, activists, policymakers, researchers, healthcare providers, and others committed to promoting the abandonment of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) in the U.S. and around the world. The Network’s mission is to eliminate FGM/C by connecting, supporting, elevating and advocating on behalf of and with diverse U.S. stakeholders engaged in prevention, education, and care. The U.S. End FGM/C Network serves as the main source for information and the lead advocacy voice on ending this harmful practice in the United States and around the world. For more details go to <https://endfgmnetwork.org>, Instagram @usendfgmnetwork, Twitter @usendfgmnetwork, Facebook @usendfgmnetwork, and LinkedIn The U.S. End FGM/C Network.

About the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C: The Washington Coalition to End FGM/C is a survivor-led group comprised of survivors, activists and advocates who worked together to advocate for the passing of a law ending the practice of FGM/C in the state of Washington. For more details, you can find the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C on Facebook.

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