

California slaps down attempts to ban circumcision

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California has banned local authorities from outlawing male circumcision, striking a final blow to a San Francisco group that had hoped to put the matter to a popular vote.

Religious groups applauded Governor Jerry Brown's signature Sunday of a bill which prevents cities and counties from interfering with parents wishing to circumcise their sons.

The move comes amid renewed debate over the ritual, which is a cornerstone of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

Earlier this year, a group of San Francisco "intactivists" gathered the 7,000 signatures required to put before voters a ban on young male circumcision.

The activists believe that [male circumcision](#) is essentially culturally accepted genital mutilation, and should be a matter of individual, not parental, choice.

Their ballot initiative would have criminalized the circumcision of minors in this western US city except in cases of medical necessity.

But in July, a judge ruled in favor of a coalition of religious groups, doctors and families who said the proposed ban violated a state law that prohibits local governments from regulating medical procedures.

[California](#) lawmakers also jumped in with a bill outlawing [local governments](#) from creating their own "patchwork of regulation" around the procedure.

Brown's signed that bill into law Sunday, effectively imposing a blanket prohibition on anti-circumcision initiatives statewide.

"The law reaffirms that municipalities cannot take away parents' rights to make medical and religious decisions for their own children," said Abby Porth of the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Porth noted that San Francisco families and community leaders mobilized against the ban as soon as it was proposed.

"There was such an enormous coalition that formed rapidly to fight this measure," she said. "I think that was out of a common recognition of the demagoguery behind the anti-circumcision movement."

Proponents of the ban drew widespread criticism this summer with their "Foreskin Man" comic book series, which featured a blond, blue-eyed superhero fighting caricatured Jewish villains.

Despite the backlash, intactivists said Monday that they are undeterred.

"Human rights takes a long time for people to understand," said Lloyd Schofield, the retired hotel worker who has been at the helm of the San Francisco campaign.

"When you have a collusion of religious and politics it's a hard thing to overcome," he said. "There are always roadblocks along the way."

Anti-circumcision advocates say they will continue to lobby with rallies and teach-ins, that another "Foreskin Man" comic book is forthcoming.

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