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December 1, 2015

The Honorable William Brownsberger
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 504
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable John Fernandes
House Chair, Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

Re: H. 1530/S. 1116, *An Act establishing civil and criminal penalties for female genital mutilation of minors*

Dear Chairman Brownsberger and Chairman Fernandes:

I am writing to express my support for H. 1530/ S. 1116, *An Act establishing civil and criminal penalties for the female genital mutilation of minors*, as redrafted, sponsored by Representative Sarah Peake and Senator William Brownsberger. This legislation creates civil and criminal penalties for female genital mutilation (FGM) committed on a minor, establishes FGM as a reportable offense under child protection laws, and seeks to have the Department of Children and Families develop education, prevention, and outreach programs around the issue of FGM.

FGM, when performed on a minor, is violation of human rights, and can have life-long psychological, physical, and medical consequences. Historically, FGM cases have been rare in the United States. Traditionally, it is practiced primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and a few countries in the Middle East and Asia. Due to increased migration from these countries, however, the incidence of FGM in the United States has increased dramatically in the last fifteen years. As a result, there are girls right here in Massachusetts who today face the risk that they will have their external genitalia removed in full or in part. While some of these procedures will be performed surreptitiously in the United States, others will occur abroad during a trip to the family's country of origin, a practice that has come to be known as "vacation cutting."



December 1, 2015
Page 2

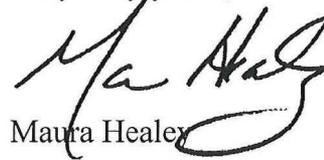
With this bill, Massachusetts has the opportunity to join 24 other states, the federal government, and numerous African countries in expressly banning female genital mutilation of minors. In addition, the bill provides for civil remedies that will give women who were mutilated or cut as children the right to seek redress from the perpetrators, just as there are laws giving victims of child sexual abuse the right to seek such redress when they are adults. And as redrafted, the bill offers reasonable criminal sanctions for those who violate the ban.

Additionally, the bill provides for education, prevention, and outreach programs aimed at increasing understanding both in the communities where girls are particularly at risk and among pediatricians, health care professionals and service providers who work with those girls.

This bill is an important step forward in providing protection against abuse to vulnerable children in our state. It also sends a strong message that Massachusetts will not tolerate FGM.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Alicia Pradas-Monne, Senior Policy Advisor, at (617) 963-2057.

Very truly yours,



Maura Healey

cc: The Honorable Sarah Peake
The Honorable William Brownsberger