



WHO WE ARE

WE ARE A SURVIVOR-LED COALITION working to ensure that the State of Connecticut joins with 39 other states – including its neighboring states of New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts – **to prohibit female genital mutilation and cutting of minors.**

ZEHRA PATWA

Zehra Patwa works in Digital Customer Delivery for the Knights of Columbus in New Haven, Connecticut and is the Co-Founder of WeSpeakOut, an organization that strives to work for equal rights for Bohra women in all spheres of life, specifically, on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) or khafz. As a long-time resident of Connecticut and survivor of FGM/C, Zehra is working to eliminate FGM/C to ensure that our state is a safe haven from the practice of FGM/C, not a destination for it. With an estimated 2,500 at risk girls in Connecticut, the risk is real and we need to ensure their safety.

MARIYA TAHER

Mariya Taher is a writer and a social worker who has been working on issues of gender-based violence for over a decade, from domestic violence to female genital mutilation/cutting. She is a co-founder of Sahiyo, an organization dedicated to working with communities to end FGM/C, and sits on the steering committee of the US End FGM/C Network. Mariya was born in the United States and lives in Massachusetts, and at the age of seven, she was subjected to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. Due to her experience and because she has friends and relatives who have also undergone FGM/C both here in the United States or elsewhere in the world, for over five years, Mariya has worked with the Massachusetts Women's Bar Association to pass legislation protecting girls in her home state from having to undergo this harm too. The Massachusetts bill finally became law in August 2020. Now, she wants to ensure that all states, particularly her neighboring state of Connecticut, have holistic laws that include community education, outreach, and outlawing FGM/C so that ALL girls are safe from FGM/C.

ABSA SAMBA

Absa Samba is a survivor and an activist against FGM/C. Over the last 5 years, she has worked with organizations in The Gambia (her native country), including Think Young Women, Young People in the Media and Forum for African Women Educationalist -The Gambia, educating communities and creating awareness on the effects of harmful cultural practices that hinder the development of women and girls – including female genital mutilation – through personal story sharing and dramas. Absa has expanded this advocacy work to the United States, where she has presented at various forums and classrooms at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, educating and demanding the state put a law to end the practice of FGM. In January 2020, she testified for the Vermont Senate Health and Welfare Committee on a bill illegalizing the practice of FGM in the state. As a survivor, Absa aspires to see a world free of female genital mutilation so girls like herself can grow to their full potential.

STEVEN HERNÁNDEZ

Steven Hernández is the Executive Director for the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO). The CWCSEO researches best practices, coordinates stakeholders, and promotes public policies that are in the best interest of Connecticut's under-resourced, underserved and underrepresented women, children, and older adults. Steven is committed to ending FGM/C as part of his work to ensure women and girls' wellness throughout their lifespan and to promote the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of children throughout the state.

JO KEOGH

Jo Keogh has been working with female survivors of sexual, physical, and emotional trauma since 2014, and is passionate about protecting women and girls from all forms of abuse. She is currently serving as Chair of the Guilford Human Rights Commission, and is a member of the Connecticut Counseling Association's Public Policy and Legislative Committee. Jo wants to ensure that all of Connecticut's girls can emerge into adulthood with their bodies, spirits, and sexuality intact, so that they may take advantage of every opportunity available to them as adults.

SANA SARR

Sana Sarr has been a CT resident since 2001. Sana understands the impact of FGM very well, observing, "I was born and raised in The Gambia, West Africa, where FGM is a common practice and majority of the girls and women in my family have been through it. I have many family members and friends and know the physical and mental struggles they continue to suffer well into adulthood, including difficulty with sexual relations and during childbirth."

FAITH VOS WINKEL

Faith Vos Winkel began her work with the Office of the Child Advocate July 2001 and assists the Child Advocate to fulfill her statutory mandates including overseeing the systems of care and protection for children in Connecticut and advocating for their well-being. Faith's primary responsibilities focus on the review of all unexpected and unexplained child deaths in Connecticut. She is responsible for preparing child fatality cases and conducting comprehensive investigations. Faith represents the Child Advocate on a variety of statewide policy committees including the Suicide Advisory Board, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, and the Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children. Ms. Vos Winkel has an undergraduate degree from the University of Connecticut and a Masters of Social Work from the University Of Connecticut.

DEBORAH BENSON

Deborah Benson is an advocate for gender equality. A retired Boston attorney, who also has a home in Litchfield County, Deborah is a Massachusetts Access to Justice Fellow who led the effort on behalf of the Women's Bar Association to pass the legislation to address FGM in the Commonwealth. After unanimous votes in both the House and the Senate, H4606 was signed by Governor Baker on August 6, 2020 making MA the 39th state in the nation to enact laws prohibiting FGM. FGM is a cultural norm that legitimizes and reinforces harmful attitudes about women and girls and their place in society and inhibits a girl's right of self-determination over her reproductive and sexual health. Deborah is committed to passing this legislation as a step towards elimination of gender inequality.

AMANDA PARKER

Amanda Parker is the Senior Director of the AHA Foundation, overseeing AHA's women's rights programs. "I believe that human rights are universal. FGM/C is a form of gender-based violence primarily carried out to control the sexuality of women and girls. This human rights abuse impacts women and girls in Connecticut, and it must be fought both locally and globally," says Amanda. Amanda develops federal and state policy proposals to protect women and girls from harmful cultural practices, recently supporting the passage of the Federal STOP FGM Act of 2020, and has spearheaded successful efforts in more than a dozen states to ban FGM/C or strengthen existing bans. She serves on the Steering Committee of the U.S. Coalition to End Child Marriage, has facilitated trainings on honor violence, FGM/C, forced marriage, and child marriage for more than 3,000 professionals likely to encounter cases, and has supported survivors of these abuses to help them find protection and the services they need.