

Maine Democrats Refuse to Criminalize Barbaric Practice

Maine Democrats voted down a bill that would forbid the unspeakably barbaric practice known as female genital mutilation.

FGM is exactly as the name suggests. The practice, often administered in secret and without anesthesia, can cause death or debilitating lifelong health complications, including painful urination. There is no health benefit whatsoever.

Among other things, the practice usually makes sexual intercourse excruciating and is meant to keep the victim from committing fornication or adultery when she grows up.

FGM has for centuries has been perpetrated mostly in predominantly Muslim cultures and is now increasingly becoming an issue in America, largely among immigrants from countries where the gruesome practice is common.

For example, UNICEF reports 98 percent of Somali girls are subjected to FGM. Meanwhile, Maine has become home to thousands of Somali refugees.

In fact, studies show approximately 500,000 little girls living in America are at risk of becoming FGM victims, not only those from Somalia but also Ethiopia, Egypt, Guinea, Djibouti and some 25 other countries, according to the World Health Organization, which estimates victims number a heartbreaking 200 million worldwide.

With that in mind, why would Maine lawmakers defeat a bill criminalizing FGM in that state?

Maine State Rep. Charlotte Warren, a Democrat, gives us a clue.

In her comments before the House stating why she opposed the measure and urged other lawmakers to do as well, the Democrat said FGM isn't a problem in their state. "The good news is this is not happening in Maine. All of the data is clear. We have spoken with doctors in Lewiston, we have spoken with doctors in Portland. We have spoken with health practitioners from all across the state for more than a year. This is not happening in Maine."

State Rep. Lois Reckitt, another Democrat who spoke against the measure, acknowledged the at-risk youth in her state but suggested the legislation criminalizing FGM was motivated by racism against the cultures in which it occurred, a suggestion for which she was publicly reprimanded.

Reckitt said, "What we should not be doing is counting potential victims at risk by counting the number of Somali, Egyptian and Gideon females in immigrant families in Maine, not unless we are willing to face the racism in that calculation and the racism and misogyny entrenched in so many of us."

Speaker Sara Gideon interrupted, "The representative is skating along the lines of questioning motives of those on the other side in a way that is inappropriate and unallowable."

Reckitt apologized, but continued with the racism attack, asking the house members how much "collateral racism" they are willing to risk to end FGM. "Maine has too much at stake to be distracted by ideology-driven laws that are bad and misguided policy."

The bill's sponsor, Republican State Rep. Heather Sirocki, told CBN News that message resonated with other Democrats and the bill failed because, "The Democrats in the Maine House view Republicans as 'anti-Muslim racists,' and, sadly, they could not move past their animus and prejudice to vote to protect little girls from child abuse."

She said the idea that FGM is not a problem in Maine is absurd. "Two years ago, Maine was selected as one of only eight states to receive federal funding for a culturally sensitive education and outreach program specifically targeting FGM in Maine's high-risk locations, adding, "If little girls in Maine are not at risk, then why are we receiving more than \$200,000 a year from the federal government to help prevent FGM? It is because little girls in Maine are at risk."

Furthermore, State Rep. Sirocki said doctors are seeing evidence of FGM in the girls and women they examine. Maine Care, the state-run insurance platform receives reimbursement billing codes consistent with injuries correlating to FGM.

Sirocki continued, "As a matter of fact, the Maine Access Immigrant Network conducted a survey and a number of doctors in Portland, Maine reported that between 5 percent and 25 percent of their patients had undergone FGM. I found that staggering," she said, "Up to 1 in 4 patients."

Although back in 1996 the federal government passed legislation outlawing FGM in America, more than half of U.S. states have passed their own laws.

"Federal laws can only be prosecuted by federal prosecutors," Sirocki said, "State laws are prosecuted by state prosecutors. That is why 26 other states have enacted state statutes prohibiting FGM. They are not mix and match. State laws are more likely to prosecute." {eo}

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