San Francisco to Consider Circumcision Ban

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER

This November, voters in San Francisco will decide whether to ban circumcision in boys younger than age 18 years, and to make the practice a crime.

Opponents of circumcision gathered more than 7,000 signatures from city residents in order to place the referendum on the Nov. 8 ballot.

If approved, circumcision of boys younger than age 18 would be prohibited unless it was medically necessary. The referendum does not allow for exceptions based on religious beliefs. Anyone who violates the policy would face misdemeanor charges, with a possible fine of up to $1,000, up to a year in the county jail, or both.

The effort to pass the referendum is being led by Lloyd Schofield, an activist against circumcision.

In the "notice of intent" to circulate the petition, which was filed with the city's Department of Elections, Mr. Schofield wrote that "genital mutilation constitutes a major health risk, violates human rights, and has lifelong physical and psychological effects." Complications from the procedure can include hemorrhage, infection, nerve damage, sexual dysfunction, and decreased sexual sensitivity, he wrote.

In its official policy on male circumcision, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that existing scientific evidence shows potential medical benefits for newborn male circumcision. But that evidence is not enough to recommend routine neonatal circumcision, according to the AAP's policy statement, which was published in 1999 and reaffirmed in 2005.

The AAP leaves the decision to parents, saying they should determine what is in the "best interest of the child" based on "accurate and unbiased information."

San Francisco's ballot measure on circumcision is sure to face opposition and possible legal challenges if it is approved.

The Anti-Defamation League is heading up a coalition of groups to defeat the proposal, saying it threatens religious freedom, privacy, and parental rights. ■

New Autism and Pregnancy Survey Launches

The Interactive Autism Network (IAN) Project is launching a new research survey that will explore the possible association between pregnancy- and birth-related factors and autism spectrum disorder. The research initiative will explore the use of fertility treatments; pregnancy complications; illness or infection during pregnancy; medications taken during pregnancy; number of ultrasounds; and induction of labor and birth complications.

The IAN Project needs information on pregnancies and births of both children with autism spectrum disorder and their siblings. To enroll in the IAN Project, survey participants must be U.S. residents and the birth mother of a child with an autism spectrum disorder who is between the ages of 0 and 17 years. To register, visit www.ianresearch.org. ■

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