

# Attorneys for the Rights of the Child

Newsletter

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## Protecting Children's Bodily Integrity



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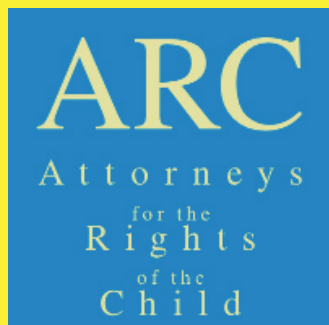
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Comments regarding the ARC Newsletter and its contents are welcomed.



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## Re-negotiating the Covenant

Daniel Green

I was scrolling through Facebook when I saw a meme that made me stop and think about circumcision for the first time in my life in November of 2019. I was 29. The meme depicts the patriarchal character Abraham sitting down, bent over himself, holding a knife to his penis. The matriarchal character Sarah stands over him pointing to his public parts. I don't remember the exact words in Sarah's speech bubble. There are different versions of the same meme with different wording. In all variations, Sarah is calling attention to Abraham's incomprehensible act.

Why is Abraham cutting off a part of his penis? I didn't write off the meme as antisemitic. As someone who understands the value of questioning everything, I began in that very instant to question circumcision. The answers that I found shocked and horrified me. I had no idea just how much had been taken away from me.

I was born outside of Philadelphia in 1990 and was cut eight days later for "tradition", as my father put it when I asked him why. Both of my parents were adopted by Jewish families. We are now learning about biological relatives thanks to 23andMe and Ancestry.com. Genetically, I am predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish.

I grew up in a Venn diagram of public school and religious school. Home life was a never ending conversation that often centered on Jewish topics. Every Passover, I was taught the importance of the youngest member of the family asking questions. We frequently attended synagogue for services and events. I remember a teacher in middle school stating that all the Jews had gone extinct a long time ago. Around the same time, a girl in my class told me that my people

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*Steven Presenting in Atlanta*

## Message from the Executive Director

Steven Svoboda

December 6, 2022

It is a pleasure to be writing to everyone at the end of our 25th Anniversary year. At the beginning of the year, I wasn't quite sure what if anything we should do to celebrate, and in the end, we carried on and finished off a few long-term projects in which we were very pleased to be involved. I was very proud and honored to co-lead the International NGO Coalition on Genital Autonomy (INGOCA) in finishing in March 2022 and then posting (<https://www.arclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/INGOCA-Core-Report.pdf>) a core report on male circumcision as a human rights violation. The guide is intended for use and adaption by local activities who are working to submit a report to the United Nations on male circumcision as a human rights violation in their country.

ARC Webmaster and Newsletter Editor David Atkinson and I worked closely together to extensively update

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## Educating Others about Male Genital Mutilation

Kelly Floyd

Like many American teenage girls, I went my entire adolescence not knowing what a foreskin or male circumcision was. I grew up in a household of all girls; I never saw or thought about penises until middle school, when I was forcibly given "the talk" by my mother. I learned bits and pieces about male genitalia in 8th grade health class, but not once did I see a diagram of an intact penis or hear any mention of male foreskin. I faintly remember a single time in high school when boys were poking fun at what they referred to as an "uncircumcised" penis, but the jokes went right over my head. It was only in my later teenage years that I finally understood that most boys I knew were, by default, "circumcised," but I still didn't have a clue what it really meant, and to be honest, I didn't really care to.

Once my oldest sister got married and began having children, she reasonably took a greater interest in topics concerning health, pregnancy, infancy and childhood. Being the right-brained woman she is, she spent countless hours researching topics such as breastfeeding, diet, vaccinations, and you guessed it—circumcision. Despite having some preconceived notions of the "right way" to participate in pregnancy and birth, my sister was very open-minded, especially when it came to confronting information that could contribute to the overall well-being of her unborn children.

My sister chose not to know the sex of her first child, so to understand the so-called "pros and cons" of circumcision was a plausible endeavor, considering there was a 50% chance she was having a baby boy. It didn't take long after joining a handful of crunchy mom groups on Facebook before she was made aware of

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what we believe is the most current and comprehensive list of medical and ethical position statements regarding male circumcision

(<https://www.arclaw.org/medical-and-ethical-positions>). David and I also collaborated on a significant update of ARC's list (<https://www.arclaw.org/legal-victories>) of favorable legal decisions and legal settlements in cases involving circumcision, including adding several recent important European cases that ARC found and had translated to English.

Please let us know ([info@arclaw.org](mailto:info@arclaw.org)) if you have any updates or corrections to either list.

The Atlanta Intact 2022 Symposium, co-organized by Intact America and the Law Office of David J. Llewellyn, was one of the biggest news events of the year and the first symposium since the last one organized by Marilyn Milos. Simply put, it was a complete blast. The presentations were fascinating and enlightening and featured lots of new presenters, many of them young, giving us great hope for the future. A whole passel of many of the most experienced and outstanding veteran

presenters rounded off a truly unforgettable event. I reunited with several dear old friends and made important new ones with colleagues with whom I hope to be working for decades to come.

ARC was pleased to be in a position to offer full scholarships to five talented participants from four different countries, four of whom gave presentations in Atlanta. The recipients included Americans Travis Wisdom and Tim Hammond, Lena Nyhus of Denmark, Linda Massie of Northern Ireland, and Canada's Andrew Little. Stories on the



*Marilyn Milos, beloved grandmother of the genital autonomy movement and founder of NOCIRC (now part of Intact America), organizer of the first fifteen international symposia, and Steven Svoboda, at Marilyn's home and NOCIRC headquarters in San Anselmo, CA, October 2, 2022.*





*Steven Svoboda presents at the Intact 2022 symposium in Atlanta, Saturday, August 27th, 2022.*

event written by all five scholarship recipients are included in our section on the symposium, along with a two-page photo spread in the center pages of this issue and many other photos sprinkled throughout the issue. We also put together a list of many of the accomplishments and activities in which we have been pleased to have been involved over the years. That list appears on page 26 of this Newsletter, our 39th issue.

Forces are pulling the United States and the world in so many different directions, and meanwhile I am so proud and delighted to see so many committed, talented folks working hard to ensure the human rights of all children.

As always, we persevere because we believe in what we do. And we know we all started as children and all children deserve respect, kindness, and love. When I started, I gave myself seven years at most in this movement, but now, with ARC a full quarter-century old, and my involvement dating seven years farther back to 1990, I cannot imagine stopping.

The old met the new recently when I received the welcome news on December 5, 2022 that the journal *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics* accepted our proposal for a short article containing my story about parental decision-making regarding circumcision with the birth of my son Eli in 2002. As reported in the ARC News section of this newsletter, four long-time friends of ARC were also accepted, including Maria Viola Sanchez, Ph.D, Petrina Fadel, and Lisa Braver Moss, which is great news.

Social media continue to trumpet inanities at us. Is it hard to stay sane in such a world? Of course it is. Modeling the ARC Newsletter on some perhaps now long-forgotten (by most) inspirations from the nineties like Ken Derifield's Intact Network, we strive to keep hope alive in our own modest way. As the father of one current teenager and one past teen, I can't ignore these forces even if I wish to. And as a patent lawyer in my



*Gina Svoboda, Linda Massie, and Steven Svoboda at the Intact 2022 symposium in Atlanta, August 2022*

day job, I certainly cannot fail to appreciate the importance of technology in all of our lives. It has brought us unimaginable options and benefits. Messages can spread millions of times faster (literally) than was possible when I entered activism 32 years ago.

The struggle will continue until no one remembers that anyone ever cut boys' or girls' or intersex persons' genitals. Why would you do that? Was the world collectively insane?

Thus this, our 39th newsletter issue includes: 1) A feature article by Daniel Green about his history with activism; 2) A short feature article by Dan MacClymont about the new organization GALDEF; 3) A feature article by young activist Kelly Floyd about her history with activism and her impressions on being an activist in her early twenties; 4) A review of Peter Adler's exciting new book, *Circumcision is a Fraud: And the*

*Coming Legal Reckoning*; 5) Steven's Executive Director's Report including a photo with Marilyn Milos; 6) news reports from ARC and relating to the struggle for genital autonomy; 7) the five Atlanta stories by our five scholarship recipients; 8) the Atlanta photo spread and the host of additional Atlanta photos to be found elsewhere in this issue; and 9) our retrospective list of our leading accomplishments and activities in our first quarter-century.

The news from the United Kingdom's National Health Service (reported elsewhere in this issue) that funding for circumcision is being discontinued (again, having previously occurred in 1950) was very welcome. While this step is being taken as a cost-saving measure along with a cessation of a number of other procedures, babies will enjoy better lives as a direct result.

We are proud to provide on our

website: 1) our "Know Your Rights" brochure providing information for potential litigants on how to seek legal compensation for the wrong of circumcision; 2) our "Know Your Rights" video addressing: What is "informed consent"? Who may be responsible for damages? What are the time limits? What sort of damages may be awarded?; and 3) a list we have been maintaining since our 1997 founding of all known significant legal awards and settlements in circumcision-related lawsuits.

A full quarter-century down the road, it is still the children who inspire me to continue dedicating our time and energy to protecting their rights.

Thank you to all our valued supporters, whether your contribution comes through support that is be financial, emotional, logistical, as colleagues, or more than one of these roles. You each make it possible for us to



persevere with this work. 100% of all tax-deductible donations go directly to defraying the costs of safeguarding children.

Tax-deductible donations that are entirely applied to protecting children can be sent to J. Steven Svoboda, ARC, 2961 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705, or can be made through paypal at our website ([www.arclaw.org/donate](http://www.arclaw.org/donate)) or using the paypal address [sarah@arclaw.org](mailto:sarah@arclaw.org). Also please note that whenever you buy anything from amazon, you can get us a percentage of all your purchases (regardless of what they are) by going to [www.arclaw.org/donate](http://www.arclaw.org/donate) and then clicking on the box labeled "Amazon Smile".

Thank you. Merry Christmas! Happy Hannukah! And a most joyous New Year!

Steven Svoboda

Attorneys for the Rights of the Child



Steven Svoboda

## Daniel Green

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had killed her savior. I remember kids throwing pennies in the cafeteria. I was once given a detention along with a kid who had kneed me, thrown me into the lockers, and called me a kike. These events took place parallel to learning about the Holocaust in religious school. My experiences shaped me into someone both at odds with and defensive of my identity. Yet I don't believe in defining myself by my identity, only by my actions, which is another reason why I don't like being marked by the traditional Jewish covenant. It's tricky to argue against the covenant and also to defend against antisemitism since I now have a strong reason to resent being Jewish.

My father, who was at one point in his professional career a criminal defense attorney with an office in Philadelphia's

City Hall, regularly leads the musical parts of my mom's services as the cantor and sings with the synagogue choir. He was circumcised in the hospital when he was born. In his generation, this was the norm. My mother is an ordained reconstructionist rabbi. My mom told me circumcision wasn't discussed in her training to become a rabbi. It was just a given. I've practiced becoming more understanding of my parents for making the decision to have my brother and me circumcised. Still, it's a major rift in our relationship.

Circumcision affects me in the most personal way. The ritual is antithetical to personal liberty and puts a limit on one's happiness. When I learned the truth about circumcision I was devastated and dumbstruck. Circumcision is at odds with the Jewish and American values I grew up with.

I'm no longer as ambivalent about my Jewish identity. While I do appreciate the history of Jewish civilization and enjoy being part of a people that have survived against all odds for thousands of years, I can't understand why the covenant became a staple to begin with. With so many people wanting Jews dead already, why begin a Jewish life with ceremonial violence? Many baby boys die from the cut or from complications afterwards. While there are no records kept on exactly how many boys die from the medical practice or from the religious ritual, even one death is unacceptable considering that the surgery is unnecessary in virtually every case.

The Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote that circumcision weakens the male organ and makes sex less pleasurable. Some say circumcision was done to limit sexual excitement and lustfulness in men,

but chopping off parts of a man's penis doesn't positively reinforce morality. It's an amoral act. Education is the only true tool to teach men good manners. Circumcision has the opposite effect of teaching men to be responsible with their sexuality. Many men will forego using a condom because they have already been stripped of so many of the sensations of sex. You tend to want more of what you can't have. I've read the statistics that indicate that where circumcision rates are high, so are other problems as well. What other outcome can violent sexual repression have?

Neither of my parents were aware of the anatomy or function of the foreskin when they had my brother and me circumcised. I remember my mom telling me during one of countless talks on the subject that she thought removing the foreskin was like removing a cuticle from a nail. I found that comment bizarre since the cuticle is a layer of clear skin located along the bottom edge of your finger or toe. This area is known as the nail bed. The cuticle's function is to protect new nails from bacteria when they grow out from the nail root. Cuticles serve an important function just like foreskin.

Many Jews believe circumcision is integral to Jewish survival. That's odd considering Moses and the escaped Hebrew slaves abandoned the practice for forty years in the desert. They survived. It is a Jewish commandment to honor the temple. The temple is the body. This is why Jews are instructed not to tattoo themselves. Jewish cemeteries to this day still remove the tattooed skin from a corpse so that it's acceptable for the body to be buried. What an obvious contradiction. Healthy functional tissue can be cut from a baby and that's a blessing but a decorative tattoo is not kosher? I've thought of getting a tattoo many times but have never gone through with it. I'd tell myself that tattoos aren't cool because you have to buy them while scars are cool because you have to earn

them. My circumcision scar is not what I had in mind when I used to say that in conversations with friends or family about my interest in getting a tattoo. This scar wasn't earned. It was given and I did not ask for it. It's fun to tell your friends about scars and the stories of how you got them. That's true for every scar except the ones from genital cutting.

There is a commandment in the Torah to not harm life. There's a commandment in the Torah not to murder. A piece of my body was cut off and buried eight days after I was born. Buried like the dead. Does circumcision not constitute a partial murder? Circumcision is in conflict with these commandments.

Sacrifice bears no meaning if it's not a willful choice. Abraham was an adult when he chose to circumcise himself. Forcing his choice onto others without

consent is unethical. The ritual denies ownership of one's own body for life by removing a piece from the owner.

If I were the leader of a group of people and I wanted to ensure group loyalty, I wouldn't ask my members to hurt themselves or their children. This is not the way to build trust between people. If there is a God, this is not the way to honor God's creation. Circumcision is a destructive act. Who knows what Abraham's reasons were for cutting himself? We do know the Abrahamic cut was far less invasive than current forms of circumcision. Just the penile tip was removed until the Hellenistic age, when rabbis decided more must be cut away to ensure group members didn't assimilate.

Who knows how accurately history has been passed down to us over the generations? Who knows if the character of God in the story of Abraham and Isaac



*Daniel Green*



was not just another human being who has been elevated to mythic proportions through the passage of time? Whispering down the lane of centuries rarely keeps the original message intact. Maybe that person had other motives for levying this commandment onto Abraham and his kin. In Egypt, slaves were circumcised. Is this a mark of nobility or a mark of subservience? According to some, priests were also circumcised. Is this a mark of spirituality or a mark of cutting one's self off from physical reality?

We know that in 2022, outward markers of physical appearance, whether they are the color of one's skin, or one's clothes, or one's body, are not an indication of one's worth. We shouldn't judge each other by appearance. If we know this, why modify the appearance of a child's genitals? Outward physical markers bear zero relevance to inward spiritual integrity or to a person's morality. The outward marking of circumcision encourages judgment of one by one's cover, not appreciation of one's story. Just to keep the analogy going, removing the cover of one's penis doesn't help a man hold his story together. I know this from going off the rails at times due to the anguish I experienced. It takes resilience to be a survivor of male genital mutilation. Circumcision doesn't grant purity. Freedom from indulgence requires a lifestyle of discipline and making moral choices, not having choices made for us.

Circumcision is a sexist double standard. We proudly fight for the rights of all people, but when it comes to the rights of infant boys, circumcision is still considered a non-issue by too many people because they are misinformed. Advocacy for the rights of newborn children is mysteriously absent from the national stage of social movements. This is a sex crime. This is child abuse. This is a violation of human rights. Female genital mutilation has been a felony offense since 1996. Shouldn't male genital mutilation also be considered a

felony offense?

Authentic learning can only come through creating meaningful and loving experiences. Circumcision is antithetical to the desire of Jews to ensure Jewish survival because although the intention is loving, the obvious brutal impact of removing healthy skin from a baby is both ignorant and cruel. Good ideas can only be carved out with good words and good actions. Not with knives. I struggle to attend events at synagogue now because of how heavily the topic of circumcision weighs on my mind.

Although I find circumcision detestable and morally reprehensible, I do not define Jewish people or Judaism by this practice. After all, circumcision is not unique to Jews or Judaism. Many cultures around the world circumcise their children, both boys and girls, in antiquity and in the modern day. It's also a problem for intersex children that are cut without consent. [Editor's note: See Travis Wisdom's article relating to intersex in this issue.] What I think is necessary is for Jewish people to acknowledge the harmful reality of circumcision, and like so many Jews are already, to transition the ritual to a ceremony that is in line with values of peace and love. I am so happy that there are many Jewish organizations like Bruchim and Beyond the Bris working to include intact members and advocating for the end of circumcision.

Some argue that circumcision is a trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation. It's time to heal from the trauma and end the cycle of violence. Perhaps this will be the last century of the ritual of cutting. Many Jews look forward to a messianic age. A time of peace without war. Ushering in a peaceful world requires making peaceful choices now, not in some idyllic future. If we can make different choices, we can make a better world by forming our own covenants with or without God, using whatever definitions best suit our unique

stories. I think a covenant with God should mean a commitment to the highest good, but I suppose that depends on one's definition of God. Abraham had his version, but it's been several thousand years. We don't need to be informed by a higher power to make moral choices. Making moral choices gives us higher power.

If I could step into the past, and travel to the scene depicted in the meme with Abraham and Sarah, I would ask Abraham to stop and explain his reasons to me. I would tell him that Jews are still alive in 2022 and to me, from what little I know, this has nothing to do with circumcision.

God asks Abraham to kill his son to prove his faith. If someone asked you to kill a relative, it might be a good idea to call the police. The test of faith shouldn't be about proving ourselves to God but to ourselves and to each other. Maybe it's time to call the police on God. I think the statute of limitations on this can reach several thousand years into the past if God's covenant has reached several thousand years into the future. If God gave us free will, then God cannot choose for us. That would defeat the purpose of being conscious. Without choice, how can we understand the value of right over wrong? If we automatically obey, then we are not conscious of our choices. We're robots enslaved to a program, enslaved to dogma. We're capable of re-negotiating covenants and we don't need to rely on beliefs in God or in traditions to make our own choices.

Israel (the name given to Jacob) means "wrestles with God". Doesn't the name indicate our duty to push back against the covenant and not to blindly accept it? To wrestle for what is right. We all need to fight for what is right. Circumcision represents a mind-body disconnect that needs to be healed. We can make moral choices based on science, reason, love, and compassion, not tradition, or blind acceptance of ancient

ritual. Rituals change. Traditions change. Change is necessary, healthy, and natural.

It is a far more sacred ritual to affirm peace, protection, love and acceptance. Circumcision teaches men that part of our natural body is unacceptable. Men cut at birth have no idea what it feels like to live in their natural bodies. Our brains are rewired. Circumcised men don't get to experience the product of eons of evolution. We're cut off from experiencing one of the most awesome and integral parts of creation. We've been denied a full human experience. Intentionally causing trauma to children is at odds with modern values. The goal of any viable spiritual practice should be to heal, not to harm. People need a culture of freedom and autonomy. Not one of fear and control.

Freedom to practice religion and freedom from religion both need to be honored in the USA in order to stay true to American values. Criminalizing ritualistic religious circumcision is not antisemitic. The only concerns should be for the well-being of children and the preservation of human rights. If pro-circumcision advocates believe the Jewish people and Judaism can't survive the end of circumcision, they do not truly understand nor do they respect the gifts and strengths of the Jewish people. There are countless meaningful symbolic rituals and aspects of the culture and religion that will remain intact after ending circumcision. Tearing apart a body does not promote preserving the body of Jewish people throughout the world.

I thank my friend anonymously for

posting that disturbing Facebook meme. He'll never know it, but the image opened my eyes to a critical issue. I'm looking forward to the success of Foregen. For nearly three decades, I had no idea what it even meant to be circumcised. Many men express shame and humiliation, but I don't believe we should continue feeling badly about something bad that was done to us. Shame should rest solely with those who continue to push this ritual and practice onto others. Circumcision is being criticized openly. Clearly circumcision's time in human culture around the world is dwindling and the possibility of healing all affected parties is coming closer. Now is a time for celebration.

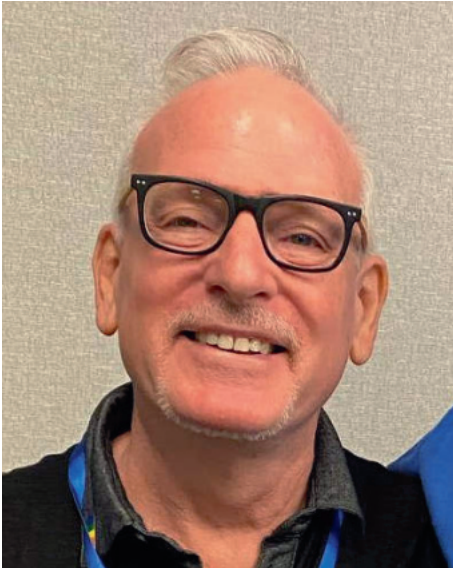


*Attendees enjoying lunchtime during the Intact 2022 symposium, Atlanta, August 2022*



# Intact 2022 Symposium

**A**ttorneys for the Rights of the Child was extremely pleased to be able to sponsor the attendance at the Atlanta Intact 2022 symposium of five committed activists, hailing from Denmark, Canada, Northern Ireland, and the United States. Four of the five gave presentations in Atlanta and all five proved invaluable, exciting, and brilliant contributors to the proceedings. Thank you, Lena Nyhus, Andrew Little, Linda Massie, Tim Hammond, and Travis Wisdom.



## Intact 2022 Highlights

Tim Hammond

**I**ntact 2022, the 16th International Conference on Child Genital Cutting, was hosted by the Georgia Tech Conference Center (Atlanta) on August 27 and 28, 2022. Traditionally a NOCIRC-sponsored symposium, this was the first conference jointly organized by Intact America (IA) and the law firm of David J. Llewellyn and the first to offer a virtual attendance option.

Participants hailed from the US, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Republic of Georgia, and Northern Ireland. Approximately 50 people attended in-person and there were 20 virtual attendees.

While past symposia typically enjoyed larger and more international attendance, there was a notable absence here of clinicians, academics and allies from the broader community of bodily integrity advocates, namely circumcised

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## Atlanta — A View from Northern Ireland

Linda Massie

**I** first became involved in the international campaign to end the genital cutting of children by establishing a NOCIRC.org centre in Northern Ireland in 1996, following the attempted suicide of my son and since then I have attended nine of these events both presenting my research and learning from other delegates. I would like to thank Steven Svoboda and Attorneys for the Rights of the Child for providing a scholarship to enable my attendance at the 16th International Symposium on Child Genital Cutting in Atlanta, Georgia.

The conference was opened by the sponsors of this event who were David Llewellyn and Georganne Chapin. David has been successful in settling cases of wrongful circumcision of infants and injunctions to prevent the circumcision of boys and Georganne is the founder and

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## Intactivism on the Cusp of Change: A Report on 'Intact 2022' – The 16th International Symposium on Child Genital Cutting

Travis Wisdom

**T**he 16th International Symposium on Child Genital Cutting, "Intact 2022," was held August 27-28, 2022, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was sponsored by the Law Office of David J. Llewellyn and Intact America. The conference was a condensed version of previous symposia, thus carrying on the work of Marilyn Milos, as a two-day event to replace the previous three-day format. The symposium was professionally recorded and live streamed for folks who could not attend in person. The program schedule can be read here: [www.intactamerica.org/intact2022/](http://www.intactamerica.org/intact2022/).

The conference featured 21 presentations. Twenty of these presentations discussed male genital

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### **Atlanta, European Activism, and Building Community**

Lena Nyhus

**T**hanks to a generous scholarship from Attorneys for the Rights of the Child (ARC), I was able to participate in the Intact America 2022 conference about genital autonomy.

For me as the Chair of Intact Denmark, participation in international symposia and conferences is valuable on numerous levels.

Firstly, it's a learning experience. Although I have been deeply involved with the genital autonomy movement for a little over a decade now, there is always more to learn and new perspectives to consider.

#### **Learning from DOC**

At this event, I particularly took interest in John Geisheker's presentation relating to documentation of the prevalence of non-therapeutic genital cutting of minors as well as prevention of forced retraction.

#### **The importance of documenting activism**

While in my opinion, the methods of Bloodstained Men & Their Friends are not practical in Scandinavia, I found Harry Guiremand's presentation, "Taking It to the Streets" inspirational as well. In Intact Denmark, we are, honestly, extremely bad at documenting our

activities and achievements, and I think that may be applicable to many other genital autonomy organizations as well. That is a skill set we are attempting to improve because documentation of achievements provides inspiration to other activists as well as demonstrating the impact and importance of our efforts. Bloodstained Men & Their Friends are excellent at documentation, and I think it is key to their success.

#### **Key differences between the US and Europe**

Perhaps I should take this opportunity to explain why I do not find certain methods applicable in Denmark and Scandinavia, perhaps even Europe in its entirety, because it is key to understanding the vital differences between the European and American branches of our movement, but also key to bridging the gaps.

In most of Europe, non-therapeutic genital cutting occurs almost exclusively in minority populations. It was never widely performed by the majority population, except for in a few countries. Therefore, opposition to non-therapeutic genital cutting may easily be misconstrued as an expression of discrimination against minorities rather



*John Geisheker*



*Eight Symposium participants walk together outdoors*

than a human rights and children's rights issue. That aspect of potential otherness must be continuously analyzed, addressed and handled with compassion.

#### **Building community**

Perhaps more than anything else, I take with me from the 2022 conference a reaffirmation of compassion: The hug I had the opportunity to give to an involuntarily cut presenter who was moved by finding himself amongst allies. The moment when one of us was overcome by emotion in the middle of a busy room but we discreetly left for a few minutes to talk through it and find calm and centeredness again.

An immensely important aspect of conferences and symposia are the moments in between: The breaks, the conversations over meals, gaining new insight into the personality of someone whom previously we may have just encountered briefly online. Participation builds knowledge, community, allies and strengthens us as a movement for the years to come.

I am very grateful that ARC made the participation possible for me and I strongly hope to be able to participate in future events.



*Lena Nyhus and Andy Little enjoy conversation and food*





### A Canadian Activist's First Symposium

Andrew Little

I anticipated attending an Intact America symposium for my first time yet I was still surprised how fulfilling this experience was. I came from the symposium having connected with many amazing people and am already looking forward to the next one.

The Intact 2022 symposium was therapeutic for me—for the first time I found a place where everyone understands the genital autonomy issue and cares about it to the same extent. It is a welcoming and comfortable space to engage with the genital autonomy issue and to network with other activists.

At the symposium, I presented about formal avenues of redress for those affected by genital cutting, including

regulatory body complaints and civil proceedings. In response, I received useful feedback and new ideas about possible strategies for this type of activism. During the event, I learned a lot from people who have experience regarding many facets of the movement, who approach the topic from medical, legal, political, cultural, religious, and personal angles.

I thank Attorneys for the Rights of the Child for making it possible for me to attend the Intact America symposium in Atlanta. This was a great opportunity to connect with others and to share ideas and experiences. Overall, the symposium felt unifying and reenergising, and so boosted my morale as I continue my personal journey and legal efforts.

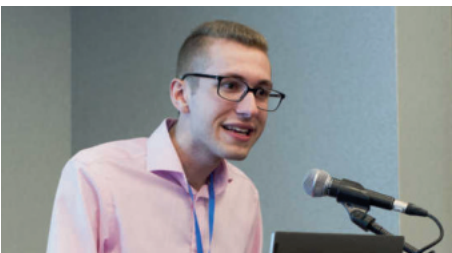
Massie

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Director of Intact America. The conference included a number of speakers from the United States, Canada and Europe who provided a range of perspectives of the harm caused by genital surgeries, the reasons why these practices should not be performed, and personal accounts from survivors of these practices.

It was great news to see the announcement of 2 new non-profits in the United States, BRUCHIM and GALDEF. [ARC ran a feature article about BRUCHIM in our December 2021 newsletter and we are including a short feature on GALDEF in this issue.]

Andrew Little from Canada presented the work he has done to date to try to raise the issue of non-therapeutic genital cutting within the medical



Andrew Little

community and the justice system. Andrew is a self-represented litigant who is taking action against the hospital that circumcised him and aims to set a precedent with his case and as a result to protect and inspire others to do so. Herman Bruyndonckx from Belgium provided a moving presentation of his experiences following his circumcision at age 4 and how the trauma impacted his entire life. Herman documented the shame he felt on being different from his peers in Belgium and the lengths to which he went in order to hide the fact that he had been subjected to this practice.

It was wonderful to see many familiar faces presenting their papers and also inspiring to meet new people who have become involved in this campaign to protect all children from those who would alter their genitals without medical necessity and whose parents are often ill informed on the lack of necessity or the consequences of these practices.

There was an announcement of two new memoirs on male circumcision, one by Georganne Chapin of Intact America, *This Penis Business*, and the other by Marilyn Milos, founder of NOCIRC,



Herman Bruyndonckx

*Please Don't Cut the Baby*, with both due for publication in 2023. Marilyn has also been the co-ordinator of international symposia on male and female genital cutting from 1989 until 2018. This was the first conference she was unable to attend and she was missed by everyone.

I always return home to Ireland with a renewed sense of hope that we can stop these practices but also with sadness that we should still need to say that cutting off parts of the genitals of children without medical necessity when they are too young to defend themselves is unacceptable child sexual abuse.





*Travis Wisdom, Steven Svoboda, and Gina Svoboda*



*Lisa Braver Moss*



*Jeffrey Cartwright-Smith*



*Norm Cohen*



*James Snyder and Tora Spigner*



*Zenas Baer*

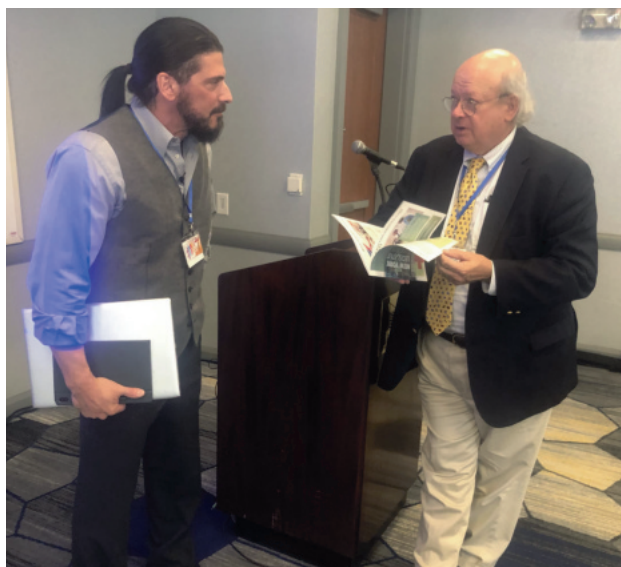


*Jeff Borg captures a photo of Eliyahu Ungar-Sargon presenting the Bruchim team members*





*Relaxing and sharing a meal after the symposium (l. to r.) Linda Massie, Steven Svoboda, Gina Svoboda, and Tim Hammond*



*Anthony Losquadro and David Llewellyn*



*Greg Markman*



*Steven Svoboda, Georganne Chapin, and Dan Bollinger*



*Teresa Willoughby*



*Linda Massie, Jonathan Friedman, Gina Svoboda, Steve Scott, and Steven Svoboda*



*ARC Scholarship Recipients with ARC Executive Director: (l. To r.) Lena Nyhus, Andy Little, Linda Massie, Steven Svoboda, Tim Hammond. Inset: Travis Wisdom.*



**Hammond***...continued from p. 11*

women, intersex, and transgender persons. The conference benefited, however, from greater participation by activists from the grassroots, Jewish and legal communities and a focus on strategies to advance male genital autonomy. There was also a much welcomed participation by younger activists.

Andrew Little (Montreal) [Editor's Note: an ARC scholarship recipient] made the conference's first presentation, reviewing the US legal history of circumcision. His participation was a landmark in many ways – being the youngest attendee (age 22) – and discussing his courageous, persistent, and groundbreaking legal challenge against his circumciser and the Ontario hospital where he was born [ARC Winter 2021/2022 newsletter]. His broad and deep knowledge of legal, medical and ethical questions surrounding male genital cutting had many attendees convinced that he should become a lawyer!

An inspiring presentation by Eliyahu Ungar-Sargon introduced the newly formed organization Bruchim [Editor's Note: Bruchim was featured in the last ARC newsletter from Winter 2021/2022, along with Andy Little]. With a reassuring message that “The Covenant is Intact!,” Bruchim focuses on encouraging

*Lena Nyhus*

a full welcome of Jewish families with intact sons into the life of local synagogues and wider Jewish communities.

Lena Nyhus (Intact Denmark) [Editor's Note: Another ARC scholarship recipient] discussed attempts by the US State Department, some Jewish organizations, and the Israeli government to interfere with Danish politics. Those attempts failed to coerce Intact Denmark to withdraw the Citizens' Initiative that would institute a minimum age of 18 years for non-therapeutic genital cutting of children before age 18. Under Danish law, withdrawal of the initiative is impossible. Lena also expressed hope that upcoming elections could result in Danish political leadership becoming more amenable to the initiative's adoption.

A disturbing review of more than 20 circumcision consent forms used by hospitals in Massachusetts and New York State was offered by Matthew Goodwin of Intaction. Preliminary findings exposed an appalling lack of uniformity and severely inadequate information on foreskin functions, surgical risks, and alternatives to surgery. Matthew questioned whether such forms can be considered legitimate enough to allow parents to provide truly informed consent. Legal experts in attendance described the forms as “low hanging fruit” for potential litigation by the newly formed Genital Autonomy Legal Defense and Education Fund (GALDEF; see separate story in this issue).

Alaska family physician Leif Thompson, MD, in a fascinating presentation, discussed psychological aspects of male genital cutting which, like its female counterpart, can be viewed by individuals as either enhancement or mutilation. He is interested in research demonstrating the foreskin's value and pathology caused by its loss. Because effects of FGC are highly individualistic and long-term adverse consequences from penile circumcision are largely unstudied,

*Leif Thompson*

Leif suggested forming a task force to lobby to include in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems manual (ICD-11) a gender-neutral category of “genital dysphoria” created by childhood genital cutting. The ICD is developed and updated annually by the World Health Organization.

Researcher Steve Scott offered a fascinating “stroll down memory lane,” sharing stories from his thirty-five years of talking with parents and interviewing doctors in the United States. Unsurprisingly, many people Steve spoke with denigrated the penile foreskin, trivialized the damaging consequences of circumcision, or belittled genital autonomy advocates.

*Steve Scott*



Anthony Losquadro of Intaction presented a report on a one-day lobbying trip to the New York State legislature in Albany to support “public policy aimed at reducing the harm and suffering of children from the practice of genital cutting or circumcision.” His inspiring review of Intaction’s Health Equality Campaign urged the audience to pursue success through the “Five

Ps”: Politely persistent people persuade politicians.

Other extremely valuable presentations were made by Travis Wisdom (Best Interests Principles for Intersex Children) and Harry Guiremand (virtually discussing strategies used by, and public perceptions of, the street demonstration group Bloodstained Men).

On the conference’s final day, the conference organized a panel regarding “Intactivism and Race.” Longtime media activist Shelton Walden and registered nurse Tora Spigner discussed the impact of circumcision in the African-American community, while Alexandro José Gradilla virtually discussed physical



*Anthony Losquadro*

forms of assimilation into white culture that were imposed and still are imposed on the Latinx community. A town hall concluded the event, focusing on “Intactivism, Religion, and Culture.”

For those unable to attend the conference either in person or virtually, presentations were videotaped by IA and will eventually be posted online.

In this author’s view, many who attended Intact 2022 expressed the unanimous hope that this conference marked a new beginning for the US genital autonomy movement, focused on a future of increased advocacy and new victories for children’s rights to bodily integrity.

## Wisdom

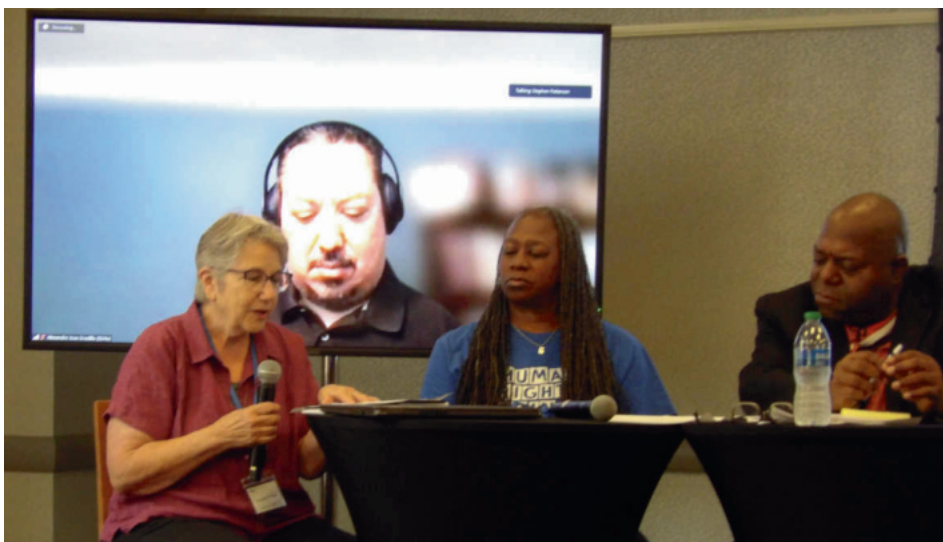
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cutting from various disciplines and perspectives, including history, religion, medicine, anthropology, psychology, law, ethics, and politics. The conference included a four-person panel discussion on race/ethnicity and intactivism, and a town hall meeting on intactivism, religion, and culture. The event did not feature a presentation specifically discussing female genital cutting.

I presented my paper, “The Development of ‘Best Interests Principles for Intersex Children’ for Intersex Cases in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia,” which is based on my current PhD research. It was the only presentation on medical interventions on intersex children. The new Federal Circuit Court of Australia, which now incorporates the former Family Court, is required (as was the former Family Court) to consider children’s best interests as the paramount consideration in intersex cases. Working within these requirements, I laid out ten human rights-based best interests principles for the Court to use in finding solutions to intersex cases that combine both children’s rights and best interests.

As my first International Symposium, the conference was a great opportunity for me to meet new activists, but also to reconnect with friends and colleagues I have not seen in over a decade. My presentation was well-received and generated a rewarding Q&A session. My participation at the 16th International Symposium would also not have been possible without the assistance of ARC, which awarded five scholarships to people in financial need in order to attend the “Intact 2022” conference. I am fortunate to have been a recipient of one of these scholarships, which facilitated my presentation and allowed me to reconnect with the genital autonomy movement.

The event was a positive experience



*"Intactivism and Race" panel, l. to r.: Georganne Chapin, Alexandro Gradilla (on the screen), Tora Spigner, and Shelton Walden*

albeit with some moments of tension. For example, one attendee voiced his opposition to intactivists mixing issues, an approach that he felt undermines the progression of the movement, specifying issues of abortion, vaccinations, and “homosexual rights.” The latter objection is a curious view, considering the long-standing presence of intactivism within the LGBT movement.

I do agree that some issues are best left divorced from intactivist advocacy, except, perhaps, in esoteric academic or philosophical discussions. However, broadening the scope of genital autonomy and improving our activist approaches help to build alliances with other communities and social justice movements, thus generating more support for protecting the bodily autonomy of every child.

There are different approaches to advocating for children’s rights, and diversifying may help us to mainstream and to legitimate genital autonomy as a universal human rights movement. Several attendees expressed concern about an absence of diversity within the genital autonomy movement, pointing to the demographics represented at the conference: among the 26 presenters and

panellists, only four were women and the majority were older white men. Tim Hammond also acknowledged this problem in his presentation on the newly formed Genital Autonomy Legal Defence and Education Fund (GALDEF) [Editor’s Note: See article on GALDEF elsewhere in this issue].

In my advocacy, I adopt a universal human rights approach with a goal to build alliances with transgender (‘trans’) people and the continued struggle to access gender affirmation procedures for consenting children and adults. My interactions with folks at the symposium revealed a mosaic of views on trans children and recognition of their rights, including access to affordable gender affirmation procedures. Views ranged from support of trans rights, sometimes with reservation about timing of medical procedures, to opposition, labelling trans identities as a “mental illness” or “social contagion.” In my view, the intersections of genital autonomy and trans rights should be discussed at future symposia to explore the relationship between these human rights movements.

Diversifying the genital autonomy movement requires refining approaches to be more inclusive or adopting different approaches tailored to the needs of specific target audiences. My approach described above may not be appropriate for all communities. For example, Carl Augustsson presented “The Conservative Case for Intactivism,” which highlighted the compatibility of intactivism and US conservative values and philosophy. He argued that as most intactivists lean left politically, the genital autonomy movement is associated with the political left and the hippy movement, thus potentially alienating conservative allies. His presentation was beneficial, and demonstrated that the genital autonomy movement can become more attractive to specific cohorts by identifying similarities and framing genital autonomy in the cohort’s terms.



*Carl Augustsson*

As there are good approaches to advocacy, there are also bad ones, and bad alliances, and the genital autonomy movement must call out bigotry in all its forms. One such form is antisemitism, which threatens the participation and acceptance of pro-intact Jews within intactivist spaces. The presence of Jewish individuals and organizations within the genital autonomy movement is longstanding. [Editor’s note: Our valued Jewish intactivists also have the highest per capita representation in intactivism of any demographic group except perhaps for our esteemed gay male comrades.] A relative newcomer is Bruchim



*Tim Hammond*



*Eliyahu Ungar-Sargon*



(<https://www.bruchim.online>), a non-profit organization founded by Lisa Braver Moss, Rebecca Wald, and Eliyahu Ungar-Sargon. Eliyahu presented 'Bruchim: New Horizons and Challenges,' which examined the cultural events leading to the founding of the organization, its successes, and the prospective obstacles to the full inclusion of pro-intact Jews. Bruchim fosters a culture of acceptance of non-circumcising Jews within Jewish communities. It also celebrates pro-intact Jews within broader cultural spaces, and helps people who are not Jewish to combat the continued and often insidious presence of antisemitism in these spaces. So doing creates a stronger genital autonomy movement and a more inclusive and diverse society.

This engaging process also facilitates the building of alliances with other communities and movements, including the intersex rights movement. The genital

autonomy and intersex rights movements should be natural allies, as there is overlap in some of the goals of these movements. But the relationship between genital autonomy and intersex rights advocates could be improved.

One such way to foster stronger alliances is to adopt advocacy approaches that respond to the priorities of intersex rights organisations and to the needs of intersex people. Many of these priorities and needs are outlined in the Darlington Statement, which calls upon allies of intersex people:

[T]o actively acknowledge our distinctiveness and the diversity within our community, to support our human rights claims and respect the intersex human rights movement, without tokenism, or instrumentalising, or co-opting intersex issues as a

means for other ends. "Nothing about us without us."

The Darlington Statement was drafted from the perspectives of intersex people of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, its endorsement by American and European genital autonomy advocates would demonstrate a global effort to build alliances with the intersex rights movement. The Darlington Statement can be read here: <https://darlington.org.au/statement/>

Whether making space for conservative intactivists, Jews, or intersex people, building a bigger table at which diversity is served and celebrated ensures that the genital autonomy movement will outlive its elders. It is the pathway to cultivate a society that guarantees a right to genital autonomy to every child.

## GALDEF

### New Intactivist Organization

Dan MacClymont

As ARC celebrates our 25th anniversary year, we are pleased to announce the founding of GALDEF (Genital Autonomy Legal Defense and Education Fund). GALDEF complements the work of other genital autonomy organizations and most specifically works hand in hand with Attorneys for the Rights of the Child (ARC). ARC's referral network and decades of experience will be bolstered by GALDEF's funding capabilities, allowing the pursuit of cases that were previously cost-prohibitive. ARC and GALDEF plan to collaborate to host legal education seminars, preparing the next generation of attorneys for advancing children's rights.

ARC Executive Director J. Steven Svoboda commended GALDEF, saying

"I wholeheartedly encourage all human rights advocates to support this effort with their time and talents." David Llewellyn, the 'circumcision lawyer', proclaimed "I think this is a great idea. We have needed such a fund for a long time." The founder of Doctors Opposing Circumcision (D.O.C.), George

Denniston, MD, endorsed GALDEF by saying: "Doctors will put down their scalpels when they realize that the profits from non-therapeutic infant male circumcision are no match against lawsuits asserting fraud and establishing the rights of children to bodily integrity."



*GALDEF Folks in Atlanta, l. to r., Eric Clopper; Dan MacClymont, Tim Hammond, and Andrew Little*

# Kelly Floyd

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the crime that is circumcision. She was at a loss for words that circumcision was recommended for infant boys and became disgusted at the thought of anyone cutting up the genitals of her perfect newborn. A simple look at “following the money” can summarize the coercive intention behind the medical establishment normalizing routine infant circumcision. Soon after finding out herself, she explained to me and my family in detail what circumcision was, why she wouldn’t be doing it if she were to have a son, and began sending all of us information about it. I initially responded apprehensively — my thought process was erring on the fact that most males I knew were circumcised, so, it couldn’t be that bad, right? Despite my initial pushback, I did see the conflict in human rights, and I wanted to know more.

I started my deep dive into circumcision, and quickly came to feel the same disgust, confusion and sadness that my sister felt; I felt embarrassed with myself for thinking it was acceptable

beforehand—it should be common sense that mutilating a child’s genitals is wrong. The veil of ignorance was gone, and I couldn’t stop digging deeper into the conversation! Circumcision was absolutely the male equivalent of female genital mutilation—no ifs, ands or buts. I had no idea that the majority of boys and men whom I knew were, quite literally, missing a part of their penis, and it was jarring coming to realize that most other places around the world do not practice this mutilation under the guise of being a standard medical procedure. I needed to talk about it, so the first place I went was social media. I went on an online spree of posting information, I couldn’t help myself. There was no way people knew the truth behind circumcision, and If they did know, why hadn’t anyone raised an issue with it?

The minute I began posting information to Instagram, I had dozens of people unfollow me. Many boys my age responded with comebacks along the lines of, “You aren’t a guy so why do you care?” “You wouldn’t understand because you’re not a dude,” “I’m glad my parents

circumcised me,” and “Ew, nobody wants an uncircumcised d\*ck.” I knew their responses were coming from a place of feeling that they needed to defend not only their parent’s choice, but also their own belief that their penis *wasn’t* mutilated. I was extremely annoyed by the possibility of people’s pride and preference becoming the reason this cycle of mutilation would continue on. I had no words besides “child abuser” for anyone who insinuated that they would be circumcising their future sons. It was very difficult for me to accept that there would be adolescents and adults out there who, even after being confronted with the information, would still choose to deform their own sons’ genitals. On the opposite side of the spectrum, I had at least a dozen girls reach out saying they had no idea circumcision was so horrible and unnecessary. Seeing the information I posted was enough for them to say they would not be doing this to their future child if they were to have a boy.

I channeled my rage against this injustice into an effort to achieve what I considered to be the only positive and tangible difference I could make in the real world. If any female I knew personally came out with the news that they were pregnant with a boy, I would create a little congratulations package for them with information on circumcision. I wouldn’t try to ask these women about their ultimate decision after giving my information to them, and I would not treat them any differently either. I would write them a kind, short note telling them not to hesitate to reach out to me if they wanted to talk about it. I knew there was a strong possibility I would be the only opposing voice to circumcision they may have heard between the time they found out they were having a boy to the time they gave birth. I have no idea if any of these little care packages changed anyone’s



*Kelly Floyd and Echo Garrett at the 16th International Symposium*



minds, but at the very least, these women won't be able to say in the future that they didn't know any better.

Once I got to college, I used any chance I had to do presentations on circumcision. These were the perfect opportunities to inform many people all at once, without them being able to walk away. The reoccurring responses among young women indicated that to that point, they had no idea what circumcision really was, or what a foreskin really was. For a generation of women still chanting, "My body, my choice," or raising awareness about the inhumanity of female genital mutilation (FGM), it was difficult for them to argue with circumcision being a complete and total violation of an infant male's body. Almost all of the women I spoke to after my presentations agreed that it was wrong. They just hadn't ever been confronted with the fact that it was, without a doubt, an inhumane practice.

In my experience with intactivism, I know I'm not going to change the world. [Editor's Note: You never know!] I've come to accept and be grateful for the little things I can do that may start larger conversations that may carry on in places of which I won't be aware. I know with certainty that by using the small bit of influence that I have, I have encouraged others to question circumcision or to come to the realization that what was done to them was wrong. Whether it has

been wearing my anti-circumcision shirt at the airport or putting my anti-circumcision position in dating profiles, I take any chance I can to show others of the harm in male genital mutilation. I continue to assert my moral authority on this issue because I know that I am right. There is no logical or ethical response coming from those who choose to argue for circumcision, and I allow little to no room for argument, not because I am trying to be inconsiderate of other people's opinions, but because I am confident in knowing that there isn't any viable argument for defending circumcision. Mutilating a child's healthy, functioning genitals is child abuse: Do you agree with this statement or not? This statement is a fact and the less room you leave for others to argue with this fact or pretend that there is nuance to it, the more they begin to realize that their argument is truly non-existent.

To this day I encourage others, especially men, to start conversations about circumcision within their friend groups, because nothing can change if conversations are not started. I don't believe anything will change within the modern medical-industrial complex — there is too much money to be made from the mutilation of male and intersex children's bodies. Real change is made from everyday people choosing to say no



*Kelly Floyd*

to the mutilation of children's healthy bodies, rather than from those at the top of the power structures that actively allow the harm to take place. I have so much hope for the rates of circumcision to fall; I pray one day our country's stance on circumcision can match the energy of countries in Europe and South America. When enough people care, real change is made, and numbers are required in order for any real change to take place within a society. All it takes is asking one question in order for a seed to be planted within the mind of someone who has never given a second thought to the ethical dilemma behind circumcision. It is guaranteed that with time, the seed will grow, because truth always has a way of cutting through lies.

## News and Views

### UK National Health Service Will Stop Funding Circumcision

November 9, 2022

The United Kingdom's National Health Service has announced that it will stop funding circumcision and twelve other procedures as part of a "crackdown" on wasteful spending that is expected to save up to 2 billion UK pounds annually. No specific

start date for the new policy has been stated.

Here is one article from November 9th, 2022, about this important development:

#### **NHS will stop funding circumcisions, tummy tucks and liposuction**

*By Jessica Warren For Mailonline*

Circumcisions, tummy tucks and liposuction are among 13 operations

which will stop being funded by the NHS in a 'crackdown' on wasteful spending.

It is thought that stopping the state funding of these operations could save £2 billion a year, along with less wasteful prescribing methods.

Last week bosses of the ailing NHS said that they want billions more cash to keep key services running this winter as Rishi Sunak ruled out cutting its budget as part of the public spending squeeze.

The £152 billion-per-year health service is seeking an extra £7 billion this year — the equivalent of an extra five per cent of its budget — to counter the effects of sky-high inflation, pay rises and Covid costs.

Finance chiefs warned that vital cancer, mental health and GP services face being axed unless the Treasury stumps up the cash.

NHS medical director Professor Sir Stephen Powis told *The Telegraph* that the 'crackdown' on procedures funded by the NHS was to help improve the institution's efficiency, and prevent wasting money 'from the public purse'.

It follows years of plans being drawn up to cut NHS costs.

In 2018, plans to stop funding breast reductions, tonsillectomies, and varicose vein surgeries were estimated to save the NHS £439 million a year, but in 2019 the spending had only dropped by three per cent in these areas, the newspaper reported.

Two years ago, 31 procedures were compiled in a list in a plan to limit funding, including imaging for lower

back pain. It is estimated that around 2.7 million procedures on the list were being carried out each year prior to this.

The new list, which includes circumcisions, tummy tucks and liposuction is the third that the NHS has made a bid to reduce costs.

Other procedures on the list include corrective operations for congenital breast asymmetry and enlarged breast tissue in men.

Created by NHS bosses and medics from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, the plan states that the procedures should only be performed via NHS funding if specific criteria have been met.

Each year the NHS in England performs 23,000 circumcisions, more than 1,000 now liposuction operations and more than 500 tummy tucks.

The drafted guidance says that liposuction and tummy tucks should not be done for cosmetic purposes, with circumcisions only being funded to treat medial problems, the newspaper reported.

Prof Powis told *The Telegraph*: 'The NHS is committed to ensuring patients

receive the most effective treatments possible at an affordable price for taxpayers, which is why we routinely assess and change services to make sure they are as efficient as possible.

'The NHS is already cracking down on medications and interventions that are of low value for patients and take money away from the public purse — including prescriptions for herbal remedies or dietary supplements which have historically cost the taxpayer millions — and we will continue building on this progress over the coming months.'

The right-wing think tank *The Policy Exchange* estimates that this new guidance could save the NHS up to £2 billion.

Chairman of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Professor Dame Helen Stokes-Lampard, told the newspaper: 'In short, this programme is about making sure we don't waste money doing things that don't work and we are instead redirecting that cash towards those things that are proven to be beneficial.'

## **The Secret Injustice: Circumcising Infants is Wrong**

James P. GaNun

Harvard Crimson

November 14, 2022

I was 11 years old when I found out I'd been mutilated. I was standing in the yellow light of the bathroom, feet clammy against the cold tile. Gut-churning feelings washed over me: confusion, disgust, and, most of all, violation. My body had been altered irrevocably without my consent. No one had ever told me; rather, an internet rabbit hole impersonally informed me that I could never live in the body in which I was originally born. I never had a say in it, because they had done it to me hours after I was born. The worst part of it all is

that I'm not the only one in this situation — in fact, I'm far from alone. As of 2016, an estimated 71.2 percent of men in the United States are circumcised.

I understand that not every circumcised man thinks about this. Most either never consider the absurdity of their condition or are content with it. But it seems that these men would also be happy without being circumcised, as the majority of men throughout history have been.

For the millions of us who do feel the lack, what recourse is there? There's no way to get back what was taken from us, and there's hardly even a movement to rally behind. Harvard is full of socially conscious young people. Walking through the Yard, opinions fly left and right about reproductive rights, racism, Israel-

Palestine, and more — a myriad of ideological battles waged daily through flyers, demonstrations, and walkouts. And yet, it seems we've missed this one: When it comes to circumcision, everyone acts like it's normal.

In reality, it isn't normal. America is the only major Western country to believe in and practice circumcision at such a high level. As of 2021, nearly half of Americans find routine infant circumcision acceptable, while another sizable proportion has no opinion either way. Conversely, in most European countries, less than 10 percent of men are circumcised.

Circumcising babies is wrong. Some have a perception that the practice is natural, yet the natural state of the body is not circumcised. Oftentimes, people cite



medical benefits as reasons to circumcise; however, these benefits are marginal at best and unfounded at worst. Others say that the issue is exclusively the parents' business, yet we generally agree that it's wrong for parents to modify their children's bodies in other ways, such as tattooing. Some religious populations, such as Jews and Muslims, argue that circumcising their children is ordained by their religion, but religious freedoms should naturally end where another person's freedoms begin. The human rights to bodily autonomy and religious freedom should extend to every child, regardless of their parents' religion; segments of the Jewish population in fact recognize this right and propose the Brit Shalom, an alternative naming ceremony that delays circumcision until the man is old enough to make the decision for himself.

To object to the mutilation of a baby boy's penis should not be in any way radical. On the contrary, this objection seems like a natural product of human reason and compassion. So why do we remain content with circumcision?

It seems that a large part of the issue is the cycle of shame. Although the evidence is all freely available, we don't talk about circumcision because it's taboo. We've taken a widespread issue and convinced ourselves it's private or shameful just because it's inflicted on our genitals. Furthermore, conceptions of masculinity play a role. In order for a circumcised man to advocate against circumcision, he must first acknowledge that he was made a victim at the most vulnerable time in his life. Frankly, many men do not feel strong enough to admit this. And so the cycle continues, the issue is ignored or downplayed, and people

inflict the same violence on their children for generations.

There are signs of hope. American infant circumcision rates have slowly but surely dropped in recent decades. With each successive generation, fewer parents believe that all male babies should be circumcised.

However, there's still a lot more work to be done. To this day, 58.3 percent of baby boys born in America will be circumcised. Our generation has an affinity for shedding light on injustice, eschewing taboos, and discussing difficult issues. This Sex Week, Harvard undergraduates will come together in open discussion to change the culture of shame around our bodies and genitals. By also talking about circumcision, we can inspire the shift towards bodily autonomy for all.

## Book Review

### Circumcision is a Fraud

By Peter Adler, MA, JD

Review by Andrew Little

*Circumcision is a Fraud: And the Coming Legal Reckoning* by Peter Adler.

Independently published, 2022

#### Preface

I comment on *Circumcision Is A Fraud* as individual with some practical experience and knowledge about the medical and legal landscapes of

male genital mutilation litigation in North America—neither as a legal scholar nor lawyer. For transparency, my case is referenced in chapter 25 as an example of retaliation observed from perpetrators of genital cutting. My case is referenced, yet I have nothing to gain from the extent of success of this book apart from my shared desire to increase awareness about genital autonomy.

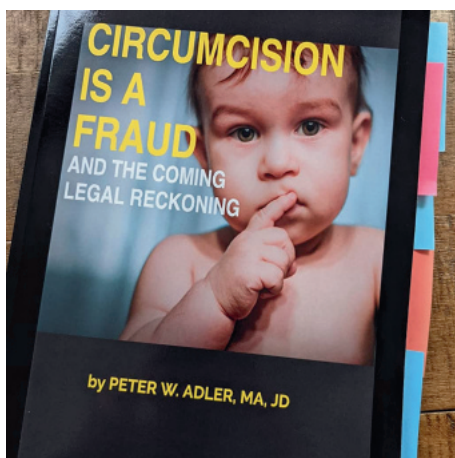
#### Review

*Circumcision Is A Fraud* is an informative exposé on the subject of non-therapeutic infant male genital cutting and its illegality and is suitable for a wide range of audiences. Adler demonstrates that the emperor of ritualistic male genital cutting has no clothes with regard to many aspects of law, medicine, reason, and systems of social values.

Adler delivers a tour de force as he covers a wide range of aspects of genital cutting. The book has an extremely wide

scope: starting with a personal experience from the perspective of an uninformed parent, Adler moves forward with a brief history of the genital autonomy movement followed by a history of the practice, an examination of religious and cultural absurdities, a crash course in genital anatomy, an analysis of flawed medical justifications, the physical damages incurred by genital cutting, and the gravity of the bodily intervention. The focus moves on to convey the thesis—to expose the flimsy legal defense for non-therapeutic male genital cutting. The book closes with a concise summary of places where future effort could provide some breakthrough and potential relief in the fight against infant genital cutting. The end product appears almost as a compendium of the subject.

It is an ambitious scope for a single book, not to mention the variability among the three broad target audiences and the compact format. Does Adler



accomplish clear communication and convincing argumentation over the course of the book? *Circumcision Is A Fraud* indeed demonstrates these strengths. Adler pulls in the reader's attention by setting the stage with a true to life story that reflects the experience of many parents at the time of 'the question' (from their doctor whether to circumcise their newborn son). Adler then crystallizes the debate with a streamlined portrayal of the core arguments presented by opponents and proponents of infant genital cutting and outlines the burdens of proof. What follows throughout the body of the book is a rapid yet logically-structured flow from subtopic to subtopic. By structuring the book in this manner, Adler effectively primes the audience in knowing what to expect before systematically deconstructing the medically-, legally-, and socially-based ideas and arguments in subsequent chapters.

Adler's book is accessible for audiences as the packaging of information and arguments is digestible

even for those who have limited prior knowledge. For naïve audiences being introduced to the subject, provided that serious thought is given to the material presented within the book, it is difficult to conceive readers putting it down with an unchanged view. At countless points, Adler prompts the reader to think seriously about the disturbing truths of genital cutting by confronting them with numerous examples of irrational thinking and inexcusable breaches of duty, presented in a coherent manner with an abundance of sources to justify points. The book gives a relatively comprehensive overview of both legal and medical themes along with an extensive bibliography of case law and journal articles.

The tone alternates between an informal aspect, one that perhaps reads smoothly and resonates effectively with target audiences, and a formal, authoritative tone when the subject shifts to legal theory. Adler narrates in a relatable style—one that engages lay

parents, legal and medical scholars, and the broader community of those affected by genital cutting. The first-person narration offers a different experience from drier theory-heavy books.

As a criticism of *Circumcision Is A Fraud*, the tone comes across as somewhat fervent at points. This impression may stem from instances of overly-decorative adverbs or places where ideas are spelled out that the readers can most likely conclude independently. The book may be perceived as slightly sensational from the perspective of audiences, although it is hard for this to not be the case—in any case, non-consensual genital cutting is an emotionally-charged topic to begin with and it is prone to awaken passion. Concededly, it is difficult to not come across with some degree of zeal considering examples of flagrant wrongdoing and negligence rampant in the world of infant genital mutilation. This criticism lies solely within the effectiveness of delivery and is aside from the gravity and accuracy of what Adler lays out. In any event, the tone sacrifices some of the advantages featured by a detached impersonal style. A more minor point of critique is that the book could benefit from implementing images in a more thought-out manner. Where images occur, they are often redundant as they do not add value to the book while appearing graphically awkward.

Overall, *Circumcision Is a Fraud* stands on its own as a cohesive, unified piece—a worthwhile read altogether. Adler is articulate and convincing when it comes to getting the main points across to a varied audience. The book gives a basic introduction to the topic and details the ideas behind the major issues at hand in a clear and accessible yet relatively detailed manner. It is jam-packed yet surprisingly thorough in view of the short format, and so *Circumcision Is a Fraud* gives more than the reader bargained for.



Peter Adler



# ARC Updates

## Steven Leads Team's Work Completing United Nations Core Report

March 24, 2022

**A** team, the International NGO Coalition on Genital Autonomy (INGOCGA), finished work in March 2022 on a core report on male circumcision as a human rights violation. Steven Svoboda was lead lawyer of INGOCGA and co-led the team's work finalizing the core report.

The core report is intended for use and adaptation by local activists in countries around the world wishing to submit a report to the UN on male circumcision as a human rights violation in their respective countries. We have already been working with local activists in Iceland and the Philippines and are actively searching for more local activists with whom we can collaborate and/or to whom we can provide the core report to support their work.

As previously reported, one of the team's most active participants was Steven's friend Paul Mason, who sadly passed away in August 2018. In addition to the team members pictured on this page, Kira Antinuk and Tim Hammond also co-authored the report.



*Four INGOCGA Team Members in Leeds, UK, May 2019 (l. to r.) Lena Nyhus, Antony Lempert, Steven Svoboda, James Chegwidan.*



*Four INGOCGA Team Members at Steven Svoboda's house in Richmond, CA: (l. to r.) Antony Lempert, Avshalom Zoossmann-Diskin, Steven Svoboda, Paul Mason.*

## Final Update Regarding Massachusetts Medicaid Lawsuit

November 1, 2022

**O**n July 22, 2022, the Appeals Court ruled against the plaintiffs in a lawsuit claiming that male circumcision is a waste of taxpayer money. The case was filed in

July 2020 based on a unique Massachusetts state law and pitted Massachusetts taxpayers against the Massachusetts Secretary of Health and Human Services. Andrew Delaney and Peter Adler were the lawyers in the case.

On August 12, 2022, Peter and Andrew filed with the Supreme Judicial Court, the state Supreme Court of Massachusetts, a request for further

## ARC Legal Victories Page Updated

May 19, 2022

**O**ur outstanding webmaster David Atkinson has substantially updated and reformatted ARC's list of favorable legal decisions and legal settlements in cases involving circumcision. The list includes several recent important European cases, some of which ARC found and had translated to English.

## ARC Releases List of Medical and Ethical Position Statements

June 13, 2022

**A**ttorneys for the Rights of the Child is pleased to announce our release of what we believe is the most current and comprehensive list of medical and ethical position statements relating to male circumcision. ARC Executive Director Steven Svoboda and Webmaster David Atkinson worked closely to produce this list. Please advise us at [info@arclaw.org](mailto:info@arclaw.org) if you feel any updates or corrections would help improve it.

appellate review. The Supreme Judicial Court exercise its right to decline to hear the case on October 31, 2022. This unfortunately ended the case with no further possibility of overturning the previous decision.

Despite the unfortunate end result, our hats are off to the legal team and we wish them the very best.

## ARC Proposal Accepted for Journal Story About Parental Decision-Making with Circumcision

December 5, 2022

**W**e are pleased to have been informed that the journal *Narrative Inquiry* in

*Bioethics* has accepted our proposal for a short article containing Steven's story about parental decision-making regarding circumcision with the birth of his son in 2002.

We are also pleased to report that four other long-time ARC friends and collaborators were also accepted, including: 1. Maria Viola Sanchez,

Ph.D., Founder & CEO of the California 501(c)(3), tax-exempt, STOP THE CUT NOW! *Eradicating Female Genital Mutilation*; 2. Petrina Fadel, Founder of Catholics Against Circumcision; and 3. Lisa Braver Moss, President and Co-Founder of Bruchim.

## ARC Accomplishments

**2**022 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of Attorneys for the Rights of the Child. During this year, we have been moved to meditate on our great fortune in working with many wonderful activists and in being privileged to participate in, and in many cases, originate, numerous exciting projects to promote children's right to genital integrity. Here is a list of the successes of which we are the most proud.

### United Nations Project

We gave oral and written presentations putting the issue of male genital mutilation on the United Nations record for the first time.

### Unofficially Winning Circumcision Debate with AAP Task Force Member

The Twentieth Pitts Lectureship in Medical Ethics, held on October 18-19, 2013, marked a debate regarding the ethics of male circumcision in which Steven Svoboda unofficially defeated Michael Brady, M.D., a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Task Force on Circumcision.

### Publishing over Forty Peer-reviewed Papers

Authoring or co-authoring and publishing over forty peer reviewed papers, many in top journals (for example, three in the world's top medical ethics journal, the *Journal of Medical Ethics*).

### Completing and Posting United Nations Core Report

A small team, the International NGO Council on Genital Autonomy (INGOCA), completed and posted on the ARC website and the INGOCA

website a "core report" regarding male circumcision as a human rights violation. For more details see the story on the previous page.

### Researching, Identifying, Commissioning Translations of, and Publishing European Legal Cases and Law Review Articles

Forty legal cases and law review articles that ARC found and translated, heretofore unknown to the activist community, are already being used by scholars in the community as integral components of some of the papers they are writing. Among these important legal cases are:

1) A Dutch case from 2007 in which the child's foster parents protected him from his biological mother, as the court ruled that circumcision was not in the child's best interests.

2) A German case, also from 2007, in which the court held that an 11-year-old's circumcision constituted an unlawful personal injury.

3) A 2013 German case in which the court, citing the possibility of psychological damage, protected the 6-year-old child of a Kenyan woman who wanted part of her son's penis to be amputated.

### ARC Newsletter

Publishing thirty-nine (as of Fall 2022) issues of our newsletter, containing feature articles by activists, reports on recent conferences, book reviews, news reports, photographs, and other important updates.

We are honored that for well over thirteen years, starting in 2009, all issues of the ARC Newsletter have been electronically provided by all three major content providers to thousands of libraries throughout North America and the world.

### United Nations Third Party Intervention

Following the sad and unexpected passing of Australian human rights attorney Paul Mason, Steven Svoboda took over from Paul to lead preparation and submission of a "third party intervention" (analogous to a "friend of the court" amicus curiae brief) submitted by the International NGO Council on Genital Autonomy (INGOCA) to the United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

### Participating in Approximately 200 Audio and Video Presentations

Since our first public appearance at



the Fourth International Symposium in Lausanne in 1996, where we spoke on "Routine Infant Male Circumcision: Examining the Human Rights and Constitutional Issues," we have appeared in approximately 200 media events publicizing issues relating to genital autonomy, including public talks, debates, conference presentations, television and radio appearances, podcasts, magazine interviews, newspaper interviews, Op-Ed pieces, and other media events. We are currently uploading many of these presentations.

We give careful attention to each media event and are proud of our appearance in the August 1998 issue of *Men's Health*, in the Fall 2002 issue of the *Harvard Law Bulletin*, and on television on *Penn and Teller's Bullshit!*, in the *Red Pill* movie by Cassie Jaye, and on Montreal's *SexTV*.

#### **Discovering Sex Discrimination Against Males by United Nations**

We uncovered, through research at the United Nations, that the Committee on the Rights of the Child violated its own procedures in removing, without any discussion or debate, "boy children" from the purview of the Special Rapporteur on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and the Girl Child (formerly "Women and Children"). We published a paper calling on the UN to rectify this discrimination.

#### **Legal Victories**

Compiling and publishing the most comprehensive and updated list of legal settlements and legal decisions relating to male genital integrity.

#### **Medical and Ethical Positions on Circumcision**

Compiling and publishing the most comprehensive and updated list of worldwide position statements regarding medical and ethical aspects of male circumcision.

#### **Compilation of Audio and Video Relating to Genital Autonomy**

Right now we are in the process of posting to our website an estimated 1,500 items relating to genital autonomy, including approximately 200 of our audio and video presentations.

#### **Circumcision – Your Legal Rights**

Producing a video with attorney and original ARC board member David Llewellyn about a litigant's rights.

#### **"Know Your Rights" Brochure**

Preparing and publishing a brochure outlining litigants' rights.

#### **Book Reviews**

Reviewing several dozen books in the genital autonomy literature, and publishing these reviews in our newsletter.

#### **Letters Submitted to Physicians' Professional Organizations**

In April 2003, ARC collaborated

with Doctors Opposing Circumcision (DOC) and the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers (NOCIRC) to mail out thousands of letters to North American pediatricians. The letters were titled, "A Caution to Medical Doctors Regarding Child Circumcision" and were jointly signed by ARC, DOC, and NOCIRC.

#### **Medicaid Project Leads to Medicaid Funding of Circumcision Being Stopped in Ten States**

ARC co-lead a Medicaid Project including sending countless letters and making innumerable phone calls to state Medicaid offices around the United States, resulting in ten states dropping Medicaid coverage of circumcision, and was the main author of a white paper on the Medicaid Project.

#### **Receiving the Human Rights Award from NOCIRC in 2002**



*Steven Svoboda receives ARC's Human Rights Award while holding his son, April 4, 2002.*

Cover photo:  
“Audience participants during Intact 2022 Symposium”  
Saturday, August 27, 2022, Atlanta

