

# **POLICY OUTREACH, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY: IMPACT REPORT**

**2015 - 2023**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
About Sahiyo	3
Why We Engage in Policy Work	3
Policy Goals	3
<b>Policy Outreach, Education, and Advocacy</b>	<b>4</b>
Global Level	4
National Level	4
State Level	5
Massachusetts	5
Connecticut	7
Washington	9
Michigan	10
New York	10
<b>Program Outcomes</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Lessons Learned &amp; Recommendations</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Looking Forward</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix - Published Blogs</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>19</b>

# INTRODUCTION

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## About Sahiyo

Sahiyo was formed in 2015 as an advocacy collective of South Asian and other survivors of female genital cutting (FGC), also known as female genital mutilation (FGM), to address the lack of acknowledgment around FGC as a global form of gender-based violence and child abuse. We utilize collaborative grassroots campaigns and storytelling techniques to train members of FGC-practicing communities in leading the demand for widespread abandonment, work with frontline professionals (i.e. healthcare providers) to create culturally sensitive systems of care for survivors, and partner with government officials to

address policy-level change. Originally one entity, Sahiyo split into two legal entities in 2019: Sahiyo U.S. and Sahiyo India. Both entities continue to empower communities left out of the discourse on FGC to create systemic change and abandon this centuries-long practice. The following report depicts the work of Sahiyo U.S. unless otherwise noted.

Sahiyo's mission is to empower Asian and other communities to end FGC and create positive social change through dialogue, education, and collaboration, all based on community involvement.

## Why We Engage in Policy Work

Throughout the years, Sahiyo has supported policy work to address FGC at the global, national, state, and local levels. We recognize that to achieve both wide-scale abandonment of FGC and support survivors, policies and laws must be informed by and created in partnership with communities impacted by FGC.

FGC is considered a [social norm](#) in practicing communities, and [laws against FGC may help to prevent the practice](#) by acting as a mechanism to shape the behavior of communities or individuals. Policies can be educational tools, deterrents,

influencers for communal social behavior change, and prevention mechanisms. Through the guidance of laws, communities can come to realize that harmful practices, even those steeped in culture and/or religion, should not be perpetuated. Furthermore, [research](#) indicates that to be more effective in achieving FGC abandonment, policies should be developed holistically. This involves integrating community education and outreach components, alongside civil remedies for survivors, rather than solely relying on criminal punishments.

## Policy Goals

Our advocacy work encompasses the following goals:

- Educate frontline professionals (i.e. healthcare providers, social workers, childcare professionals, etc.), lawmakers, and constituents, engaging them to support policies addressing FGC.
- Uplift and include the voices of survivors in educating policy-makers.
- Unite diverse stakeholders and establish shared concerns and connections related to FGC, fostering a collective impact and the creation of state-level coalitions dedicated to advocating for policy-level changes to address FGC.
- Increase individual civic engagement in the policy process and ensure that impacted communities have a voice in the creation of policies to prevent and support survivors.

# POLICY OUTREACH, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY

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## Global Level

[The Global Platform for Action to End FGM/C](#), of which Sahiyo is a founding member, is a consortium of civil society organizations, champions, survivors, and grassroots representatives united in a shared mission: to advocate for and support the abandonment and prevention of FGC. The coalition was formed in June 2019, when current members came together at the [Women Deliver Conference](#) to develop a global [Call to Action to End FGC](#).

Since its inception, the Global Platform has sponsored and hosted four webinars, including:

- [Partnerships to Accelerate Global Action to End FGM/C by 2030](#)
- [Engaging Men to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting](#)

## National Level

Sahiyo has supported advocacy at the national level in the United States and other countries, including India. We also aim to create a space for individuals from FGC-impacted communities to reflect on the political situations surrounding FGC laws, or lack thereof, within their specific contexts. These individuals are encouraged to write for our blog, host public forum discussions, send letters to legislators, speak with media journalists, testify at hearings, and more.

These are a few examples from our collaborative work and community engagement:

- [Female Genital Cutting charges dismissed but our work continues: Global reactions to Michigan case news](#)
- [The overturning of Roe v. Wade and its implications for survivors of FGC](#)
- [Gender-Affirming Treatments are not Female Genital Cutting](#)

- [An Emergency Within an Emergency: The Crises of Climate Change and Female Genital Cutting](#)
- [There's an App For That? Technological Innovation and Change Towards Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting](#)

In 2023, the Global Platform was asked to host a second pre-conference on FGC at the Women Deliver Conference in Kigali, Rwanda. The theme of [Women Deliver 2023](#) was “Spaces, Solidarity, and Solutions”; the FGC pre-conference was an opportunity for advocates from around the globe to gather, focus on pressing needs in the field (i.e., funding grassroots advocacy efforts), and create the [KIGALI DECLARATION: A GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION](#) for additional funding to the FGC field.

Being able to build collective spaces and opportunities that are safe and welcoming to conversations around these topics can provide community-wide healing for those impacted by FGC, as well as ongoing support for civil advocacy.

Another example of national-level advocacy is Sahiyo’s role in submitting an [amicus brief](#) in response to the [2017 Dr. Nagarwala Federal Michigan case](#). The amicus brief was filed on November 6, 2018 by Equality Now, in partnership with Sahiyo, WeSpeakOut, and Safe Hands for Girls. The aim of the brief was to inform the District Judge ruling over the case on [global and international efforts to end FGC](#). An amicus brief, also known as amicus curiae (meaning “friend of the court”), is a brief written by a group or individuals who are not directly involved in the case, but have insight and expertise they can offer to help the court make their decision.

## State/Local Level

Sahiyo's state-level advocacy grew from the recognition that there is a lack of legal protections for children in the U.S. from FGC. As of December 2023, [9 out of 50<sup>1</sup>](#) U.S. states do not have laws addressing FGC. Sahiyo has led state-level work, namely building survivor and community-led coalitions in [Massachusetts](#), [Connecticut](#), and [Washington](#), to raise awareness and education on FGC and the need for comprehensive state-level policy. Sahiyo has also engaged in grassroots advocacy to encourage FGC-impacted communities and survivors to get involved in policy efforts, hosted educational events and roundtable gatherings for legislators and/or community members, and educated policy-makers on how to build culturally sensitive policies that do more than only criminalize FGC, particularly with the recognition that minority groups and people of color are disproportionately harmed by criminalization. This education

for policy-makers includes the importance of supporting the inclusion of provisions for civil remedies for survivors, as well as allowing for education and outreach opportunities for both FGC-impacted communities and frontline professionals, like healthcare providers who may come in contact with at-risk children and/or survivors.



## Massachusetts

Sahiyo has supported work to create a holistic Massachusetts law protecting children from FGC since 2015, in partnership with the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Coalition to End FGM/C (formed in 2013). In 2018, Sahiyo Co-Founder and U.S. Executive Director Mariya Taher created [a Change.org petition](#) that received over 400,000 signatures in support of the law, and on August 6, 2020, Massachusetts Governor, Charlie Baker, signed Bill H4606, ["An Act Relative to the Penalties for the Crime of Female Genital Mutilation,"](#) into law.

Throughout the seven years of advocacy that it took to achieve this accomplishment, Sahiyo led efforts to organize various educational events on FGC, including screenings of digital stories from the [Voices to End FGM/C](#) project, a [Change.org petition delivery event](#), a [Roundtable on FGM/C](#), and more. Throughout the education and advocacy efforts, several written proclamations were issued by the Massachusetts Governor to raise further awareness of the harmful practice and its prevalence on February 6th, the United Nations designated *International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation*.

See related media articles:

- [As Massachusetts bans female genital cutting, survivors and activists celebrate](#)
- [Women lawyers urge lawmakers to criminalize female genital mutilation](#)
- [Advocates push for anti-female genital mutilation law](#)
- [Petition calls on Massachusetts lawmakers to ban female genital mutilation](#)
- [US House votes to recognize FGM as a human rights violation](#)



<sup>1</sup> As of December 31, 2023, the 9 states are Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, and New Mexico along with Washington D.C.

# Roundtable on FGM/C in Massachusetts

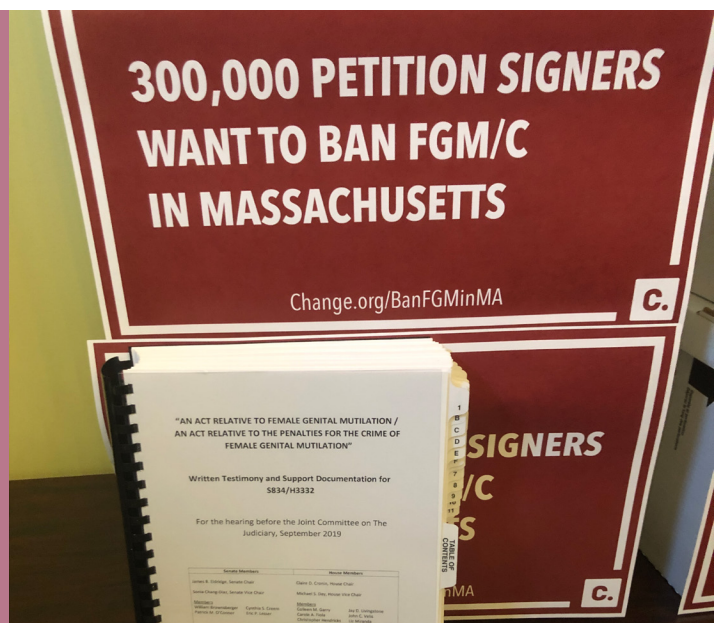


Sahiyo led the efforts to organize the first-of-its-kind **Roundtable in Massachusetts** on June 13, 2019. During this event, a collective of almost 60 experts from different disciplines and cultural groups took the first steps to create a **‘Massachusetts End FGC Network,’** created to highlight the largely unrecognized global issue of FGC and to share knowledge and resources to help end the practice in the state. The experts gathered included community leaders, civic society organizations, health professionals, state

government officials from the Massachusetts Legislature, the Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate, and federal government officials from the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security Investigations. The event was co-sponsored by the Muslim American Leadership Alliance (MALA), Tostan, MassNOW, Lesley University, the U.S. End FGM/C Network, and the Women’s Bar Association of Massachusetts

*“As a member of the Massachusetts Coalition, I can confirm that passing a law to ban FGM/C at the State or Federal level is just the first step in ending the practice in the USA and worldwide by 2030. In conjunction with legislation, we must develop and implement healthcare policy, child protection guidance, and community outreach and education programs too, and that is what Sahiyo is uniquely qualified and positioned to do. I am proud to be part of their policy and program work, as a member of the MA Coalition and a Sahiyo U.S. Advisory Board member.”*

~ JOANNE GOLDEN



## Connecticut

Sahiyo supported the formation of [The Connecticut Coalition to End FGC](#), a survivor-led group that formed in 2020 to address the lack of a law in the state addressing FGC. The Coalition has conducted educational trainings, written draft bills for consideration by the Connecticut Legislature, hosted educational [webinars](#), and advocated for the passage of a bill on FGC in Connecticut. Sahiyo has also delivered educational presentations on trauma-informed care and safeguarding children's health and well-being to a variety of stakeholders in the state, including:

- Connecticut Maternal and Child Health Coalition
- Connecticut Coalition on Human Rights
- Connecticut Public Health Association Executive Advocacy Committee
- Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children
- Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity
- The Connecticut Women's Consortium and Behavioral Health Providers
- The Human Anti-trafficking Response Team

Through conversations with legislators, the coalition garnered enough support to encourage Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont to issue a proclamation against FGC on February 6th, 2023, recognized as the *International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM/C*. Additionally, Connecticut Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz issued a citation in support of the cause.

In November 2023, Sahiyo supported a [legislative briefing](#) on FGC hosted by the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO) and Connecticut Representative Jillian Gilchrest. Notable guests included Mariya Taher, Co-Founder and U.S. Executive Director of Sahiyo, along with experts from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The briefing aimed to initiate a dialogue and lay groundwork for introducing an FGC bill during the next legislative cycle in January 2024. The goal is for Connecticut legislators to acknowledge and address the need to promote a safer, healthier future for all within the state.

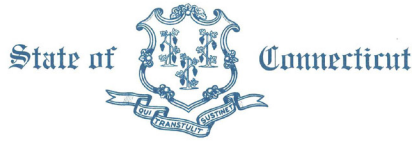


*"How do we be sensitive so as not to make it an Islamophobic issue, and I understand people are trying to be very sensitive, but we separate out the culture and the practice... As we develop this law and push it through, we really need to make sure that we're separating the practice, not the people and not the whole community."*

~ ZEHRA PATWA,  
CONNECTICUT RESIDENT, FGC SURVIVOR

*"Sahiyo's grassroots, survivor-led efforts in protecting girls from gender-based violence, in this case, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), is interrupting generational trauma, and saving lives. Connecticut remains an outlier as one of the few states in the country yet to adopt a clear ban and penalties against FGM/C."*

~ STEVE HERNANDEZ,  
CONNECTICUT COALITION TO  
END FGM/C MEMBER



By Her Excellency Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor  
**Official Statement**

I hereby recognize

### Zero Tolerance of FGM/C Day

as a day of awareness and discussion in Connecticut. The Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C is a strong champion for the eradication of this human rights transgression. On this day, we work to end this deleterious practice that occurs worldwide and in our state. FGM/C imposes a serious and ongoing threat to physical and mental harm on young girls and women. To advance human rights, gender equality, and protection for all those impacted by this act, we must show there is no place for FGM/C in our society.

May we all take time on this day to support women and girls.

Signed this 6<sup>th</sup> Day of February, 2024



*Susan Bysiewicz*  
Lieutenant Governor



By Her Excellency Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor  
**Official Statement**

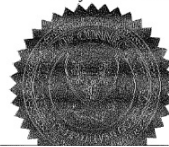
I hereby recognize

### Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Day

as a day of awareness and discussion in Connecticut. The Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C is a strong advocate for the elimination of this human rights violation. On this day, we work to end this harmful practice that occurs worldwide and in our state. FGM/C imposes immense physical and mental harm on young girls. To advance human rights and gender equality, we must show there is no place for FGM/C in our communities.

May we all take time on this day to support women and girls.

Signed this 6<sup>th</sup> Day of February, 2023



*Susan Bysiewicz*  
Lieutenant Governor



By His Excellency Ned Lamont, Governor: an  
**Official Statement**

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is the altering, injuring, or removal of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons in order to control a girl's sexuality and make her acceptable for marriage and to the community in which she lives – it is an extreme form of gender-based violence that is recognized as a human rights violation and a form of torture; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a global practice that transcends race, religion, ethnicity, and country of origin and still occurs in 92 countries around the world; and

WHEREAS, a prevalence study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that as of 2012, over 500,000 women and girls in the United States underwent FGM/C or were at risk of FGM/C – and as of that report, Connecticut ranks 26<sup>th</sup> in the nation for at-risk populations; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting poses serious physical and mental health consequences to girls, including excessive bleeding, damage to adjacent organs, infection, and death; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a serious and ongoing risk to girls who are among the most vulnerable in our communities, including those in the State of Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation should not be treated differently than other forms of violence involving children; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively and disproportionately affected girls and women, resulting in a crisis within a crisis including an increase in Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting worldwide; and

WHEREAS, February 6 is the International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, a day designed to promote the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting by 2030 through efforts to engage whole communities and focus on human rights, gender equality and attention to the needs of women and girls who suffer from its consequences; now

HEREFORE, I, Ned Lamont, Governor of the State of Connecticut, do hereby officially proclaim the day of Monday, February 6, 2023, to be the

### DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

in the State of Connecticut.



*Ned Lamont*  
GOVERNOR



By His Excellency Ned Lamont, Governor: an  
**Official Statement**

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is the altering or injuring or removal of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons in order to control a girl's sexuality and make her acceptable for marriage and to the community in which she lives. It is an extreme form of gender-based violence that is recognized as a human rights violation and a form of torture; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a global practice that transcends race, religion, ethnicity, and country of origin and has been found to occur in 92 countries including the United States; and

WHEREAS, a Center for Disease Control and Prevention study revealed that over half a million women and girls in the United States underwent or were at risk of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting including women and girls living in our own State of Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting poses serious physical and mental health consequences including excessive bleeding, damage to adjacent organs, infection, and death, compromises a girl's reproductive rights and may lead to maternal and/or fetal death; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is usually performed on young girls between the ages of birth and puberty. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is not widely reported given the highly personal and sensitive nature of the subject matter and the secrecy with which Female Genital Mutilation is performed. The context and consequences of Female Genital Mutilation are often shrouded in secrecy, and misinformation about what the procedure entails and why it is performed is pervasive; and

WHEREAS, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a serious and ongoing risk to girls who are among the most vulnerable in our communities. FGM/C should not be treated differently than other forms of violence involving children; and

WHEREAS, February 6 is the International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, a day designed to promote the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting by 2030 through efforts to engage whole communities and focus on human rights, gender equality and attention to the needs of women and girls who suffer from its consequences. This day calls on the global community to reimagine a world that enables girls and women to have voice, choice, and control over their own lives; and

HEREFORE, I, Ned Lamont, Governor of Connecticut, do hereby proclaim the month of February 6, 2024 as:

### Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

in the State of Connecticut



*Ned Lamont*  
GOVERNOR



# Washington

In 2023, Sahiyo supported the formation of the [Washington Coalition to End FGM/C](#). The Coalition consists of survivors, advocates, and community-based organizations from the state as well as across the United States, and is headed by [Voices to End FGM/C](#) alumna Absa Samba. In this space, Sahiyo led the development of a public webinar, [“Protecting Children in Washington State from FGM/C,”](#) in partnership with the Coalition, the U.S. End FGM/C Network, Children’s Alliance, and Mother Africa; the webinar served to educate constituents and stakeholders about the proposed legislation, Senate Bill 5453. During the event, audience members were urged to take action and support the bill by signing onto an [action alert](#) that sent information to their legislators about the issue of FGC.



**Protecting Children in Washington State from Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting**



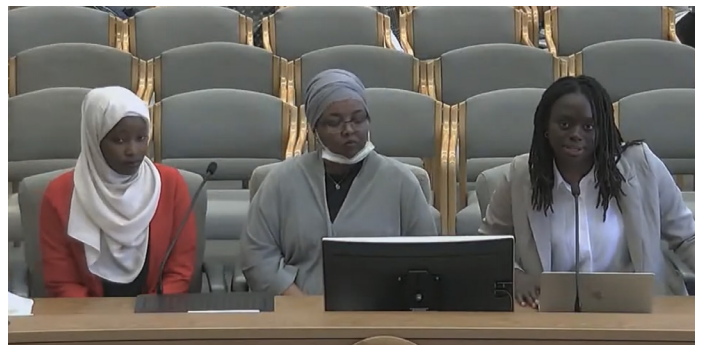
   

*“This education component of this bill is huge for our [Somali] community. I think this bill coming from us, for us, by us, to help the community, I think it is a beautiful thing. I am confident that the community will accept it.”*

~ MUNA OSMAN,  
PROTECTING CHILDREN IN WASHINGTON STATE  
FROM FGM/C WEBINAR PANELIST

*“The pressure to undergo FGM can be intense for girls and their families...the solution is to coordinate change in families and communities so that people are not acting in isolation. If everybody can agree to abandon the practice, the negative sanctions can be lifted...When other members of the community are given the power of law to strengthen their position, the law becomes a powerful tool for enhancing their power to persuade others that this is a practice that’s no longer relevant in this context and in this time.”*

~ BETTINA SHELL DUNCAN,  
WASHINGTON STATE FROM  
FGM/C WEBINAR PANELIST



[Senate Bill 5453](#), informed by the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C and championed by state Senator Karen Keiser, passed unanimously in the Washington Legislature, and was signed into law in April 2023. The law prohibits FGC on minors, introduces a civil cause of action for survivors of FGC, and establishes an educational program aimed at preventing FGC in Washington.

## Michigan

On October 9, 2017, Sahiyo facilitated a [roundtable discussion](#) in partnership with Equality Now, Tahirih Justice Center, and former Michigan's Department of Health and Services (DHHS) to engage in a cross-discipline conversation on addressing FGC in the state. The roundtable was created as a result of the [2016 Michigan case](#) involving a doctor charged with performing FGC on minor girls, highlighting the necessity for DHHS to support their child protection services professionals with training around FGC. During the roundtable, attendees increased their cultural competence and knowledge of FGC; identified strengths and gaps in Michigan's policies related to FGC; and discussed strategies to improve outcomes for children and families moving forward, of which has been implemented since the roundtable.



## New York City

Following the passage of a citywide ordinance on FGC in New York City, the city established an [FGM/C Advisory Committee](#) under Local Law 109 of 2021. Chaired by The Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV), this committee aims to make recommendations that engage communities and agencies in decreasing and eventually eliminating FGC within the city. The advisory committee also aims to identify supportive community-based and culturally responsive resources for people who have undergone FGC. Mariya Taher, Sahiyo's Cofounder & U.S. Executive Director, sits on the New York City FGM/C Advisory Committee. Sahiyo has also provided support by contributing educational materials developed by the organization for the committee's purposes.



# PROGRAM OUTCOMES

## By the numbers: Program impact from 2016–2023

**3** state coalitions were formed  
**2** states passed new legislation on FGC  
**1** website was created for the *Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C*  
**2** Facebook pages were created for the *Washington Coalition & Connecticut Coalition*  
**58** educational meetings with legislators were held  
**19** educational outreach webinars related to policy were hosted  
**42** policy-related blog posts were posted on *Sahiyo's website*  
**2** action alerts created in partnership with UNICEF USA & Equality Now

Our four originally established policy goals have been achieved in the following ways:

- Educate frontline professionals (i.e. healthcare providers, social workers, child care professionals, etc.), lawmakers, and constituents, engaging them to support policies addressing FGC.

Sahiyo actively supported the Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C by providing resources to develop a dedicated [website](#) and establish a social media presence. This included the creation of a [Facebook](#) page spotlighting the coalition's mission, educating the public about ongoing advocacy efforts, and guiding individuals on engaging with legislators to support legal action around ending FGC. The website also serves as a repository for FGC-related resources and offers insights into the practice's prevalence in the United States.

Since 2016, Sahiyo has been engaged in **58 meetings with legislators** to raise awareness about the harms and prevalence of FGC as well as policy needs to address the social issue within their respective states. Additionally, Sahiyo has created educational resources such as fact sheets, brochures, and letters of support to further its advocacy efforts.

- Unite diverse stakeholders and establish connections related to FGC, fostering a collective impact and the creation of state-level coalitions dedicated to advocating for policy-level changes to address FGC.

With Sahiyo's assistance, **3 state coalitions**— Connecticut, Washington, and Massachusetts— have been established. In these states, Sahiyo leveraged its partnerships and platform in order to build the coalition from the ground up.



## A conversation with Washington activist Absa Samba: SB 5453 is a product of collaboration and persistence

What began as a class assignment evolved into an opportunity for Absa to chat with Senator Karen Keiser on FGM/C in May of 2022.

“The Senator herself met with me and wanted to chat about the bill, the issue. And out of that conversation, I was like, okay, maybe a presentation on what FGM is would be helpful for this person, they seem really interested in it. So I opted to do a presentation, and the Senator was gracious enough to take the offer and invited other chairs of different Committees in the Senate to come to that, and it was at that point that I realized I was taking on more than I could afford to at the time. So I was connected with Mariya [Taher] and I reached out to Bettina [Shell-Duncan] and other folks and I said, ‘Hey, this is an opportunity to talk to these people about FGM in Washington, would you be interested in joining?’ And they were kind enough to come on and help me with that presentation, and I think it was that moment that we realized, actually, this is really an opportunity to do something about this issue in Washington State,” said Absa Samba

By pulling together support from the FGM/C sphere, Absa unknowingly planted the seed for the group that would become a key stakeholder in SB 5453’s creation.

Senator Keiser recognized the opportunity to do something from this initial experience; “her desire in introducing a bill on FGM/C solidified this work.” Absa began to facilitate the group working with Senator Kaiser, who was determined to loop in advocates and survivors in creating the bill. Absa would organize meetings and generate statements for the group, which eventually became the Washington Coalition Against FGM/C. The Coalition and various other stakeholders worked closely to co-author the bill, and Absa is rightfully proud of that.

[Read more here.](#)



- **Uplift and include the voices of survivors in educating policy-makers.**

Sahiyo has hosted **19 educational webinars** targeting legislators, community members, and more, aiming to provide education and insights into FGC and lay the foundation for future legislative support. One such webinar, [Moving Connecticut Ahead: Protecting Girls From FGM/C](#), held in September of 2022, framed FGC as a harmful global social norm. The webinar highlighted that, while Connecticut has addressed various human rights violations stemming from social norms through legislation, such as human trafficking, child marriage, and conversion therapy, the issue of FGC is yet to be addressed. Overall, the webinar explored how

Connecticut can move forward to address this issue through legislation, seeking to enhance protections for women and girls from FGC.

- Increase individual civic engagement in the policy process and ensure that impacted communities have a voice in policies created regarding preventing FGC and supporting survivors.

Sahiyo's commitment to engaging impacted communities in political and legal processes is evidenced by the concrete outcomes achieved: **two states** successfully enacted new legislation with input from communities and stakeholders impacted by FGC. Sahiyo additionally collaborated with other organizations to create **two impactful action alerts** calling on the public to write to legislators to push for state legislation on FGC.

The organization also published **numerous FGC policy-related blogs** on its website to inform the public on FGC legislation.

### Proposed legislation in Idaho and Texas discriminates against Transgender Youth and removes protections for children at risk of undergoing FGC

Texas and Idaho are two states in which female genital cutting (FGC) is illegal under state law, for now. In both states, amendments have been proposed in the state legislature that would alter existing policy against FGC to ban gender-affirming care for minors. Gender-affirming care includes social, psychological, behavioral, and medical practices which affirm the gender identity for individuals whose gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth. These amendments are dangerous for transgender youth as well as children who are at risk for or have undergone FGC.

[Read more here.](#)



### Female Genital Cutting charges dismissed but our work continues: Global reactions to Michigan case news

On November 20, U.S. **District Judge Bernard Friedman** dismissed the female genital cutting charges in the historic **Michigan case** involving girls from the Dawoodi Bohra sect, emphasizing that FGC should be regulated by states as a "local criminal activity." Congress enacted the 22-year-old federal law banning FGC in 1996 — the law Judge Friedman has declared unconstitutional.

*In light of these developments, we would like to share the responses of many Bohras and other activists working to end FGC.*

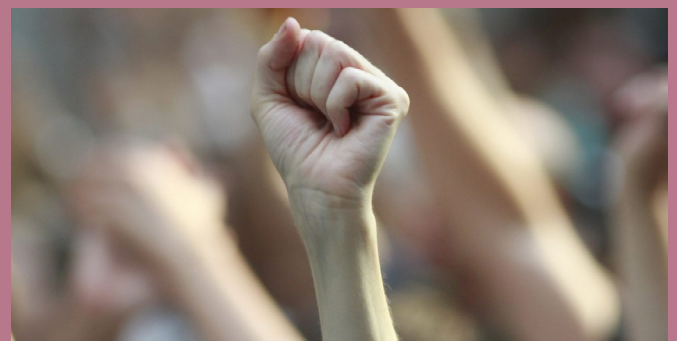
*"What is so disappointing to me is that justice will be delayed in this case. There is a growing, global movement against khafz/FGC and we need positive judgments to send a strong message to our community that this practice is harmful and illegal. We must protect future generations of Bohra girls."*

~ FARZANA DOCTOR,  
CANADA

*"By declaring the federal ban on FGM/C unconstitutional, Judge Friedman opens the door for parents to do exactly what was done in this case — take their daughters from states that ban FGM/C to states that don't so they can be cut."*

~ UMME KULSOOM ARIF,  
USA

[Read more here.](#)



# LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Through our policy advocacy, we have encountered various challenges and opportunities, leading to several key lessons learned.

## Building a robust coalition

### Diverse representation

In the realm of policy advocacy, assembling a robust coalition that represents a wide range of stakeholders, communities, and local interests is critical. This diverse coalition can demonstrate broad-based support for FGC-related policy initiatives, making it more likely for a policy to gain traction. In the context of FGC, it is crucial to ensure representation from individuals with lived experiences of FGC within this coalition.

### Strength in numbers

A diverse coalition brings with it a wealth of perspectives, expertise, and resources. This diversity enhances the credibility of the advocacy effort and helps craft more comprehensive and nuanced policy proposals. Additionally, the collective influence of a diverse coalition can exert significant and multi-targeted pressure on policymakers and serve as a means to garner a wider array of allies in support of the cause.

### Relationship building

Building such coalitions involves fostering relationships and trust among partners. Successful coalitions require regular communication, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose. Dedicated effort and time are essential to cultivate and maintain these relationships.

## Recognizing local context & adapting outreach strategies

### Context matters

Policy advocacy is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Each state may have distinct political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts that necessitate tailored strategies. What works in one state may not be effective in another.

### Research and adaptation

For policy outreach, using research to understand the local context, including the political landscape, key decision-makers, and the specific needs and concerns of the community is a necessity. The ability to adapt outreach strategies based on this understanding is crucial for success. Having some form of data, whether anecdotal stories or research-based evidence regarding FGC prevalence, greatly aids in illustrating that FGC is a universal issue, and not confined to specific locations or cultures.



## Flexibility

Being open to adjusting tactics and messaging as circumstances evolve proves to be a valuable lesson. This adaptability or flexibility ensures that the advocacy program remains relevant and responsive to the ever-changing dynamics within the state legislature, political climate, and more.

## Creating accessible advocacy for public engagement

### Multiple avenues for engagement

Effective advocacy should provide multiple avenues for public engagement, as well as information and guidance on advocacy issues. This includes ensuring resources are accessible, such as sharing information in newsletters, blogs, fact sheets, social media, and other communication mediums.

### Partnering for impact

Collaborating with organizations that can support creating action alerts, petitions, and template letters that organizations and individuals can use to state their support, and that simplifies the advocacy process for the public can be a useful tool. This lowers the potential barriers or challenges for someone to get involved, encouraging more people to participate in advocacy efforts.

### Leveraging local point persons for in-person events

Appointing and/or recognizing local point persons or ambassadors within a coalition can help drive coalition initiatives forward. Their familiarity with the local landscape and expertise in advocacy issues can help facilitate engagement. Furthermore, these individuals can offer insights into the local political climate, key stakeholders, and potential opportunities for facilitating advocacy efforts.



## The importance of survivor and community engagement

### Humanizing the issue

Engaging survivors and affected communities in advocacy efforts is pivotal. Their stories and lived experiences can humanize the issue, fostering greater empathy and understanding among policymakers and the public.

### Connecting with legislators

Survivors and community members can also play a crucial role in connecting with legislators on a personal level. Building these relationships similarly nurtures empathy and understanding, eliciting legislator support for the proposed legislation.

## Sustaining engagement during implementation

### Long-term planning

Following the passage of a policy, there can be a tendency for coalition engagement to wane. Advocacy programs should consider long-term strategies to sustain engagement, such as continuing to build awareness campaigns, monitoring policy outcomes, and providing regular updates to the coalition and the broader public about the law and implementation.

## Implementation advocacy

### Policy monitoring

Implementing a new law can take months or years to do, thus implementation advocacy involves continuous monitoring of its execution. Advocates can still be involved with tracking the progress of the law's different components, identifying challenges, and working with those now responsible for implementation. This proactive approach helps address any delays or issues that may arise during the process, and support accountability of the new law to the public.

### Continued collaboration

Continued collaboration between individuals who were engaged in passing the legislation can be useful during the implementation phase. Advocacy groups can continue working with their coalition partners, relevant government agencies, and stakeholders to ensure the policy achieves its intended goals.

Overall, we hope these lessons learned will enhance the effectiveness and endurance of advocacy efforts aimed at fostering meaningful systemic change in ending FGC.





# LOOKING FORWARD

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Sahiyo will continue to participate in policy education and outreach through ongoing advocacy efforts. We aspire to expand our initiatives in policy-building through various efforts, including:

- Working towards creating comprehensive legislation addressing FGC across all states, prioritizing survivor support, cultural sensitivity, and community education, as well as reporting mechanisms for those at risk.
- Increasing opportunities for survivors to access federal and state-based victims' services and compensation (i.e. civil remedies).
- Supporting federal and state-level systems to become more culturally inclusive and sensitive to efforts to end FGC through education and outreach.
- Increasing opportunities for citizens to learn about FGC legislation in their area and providing them with resources to contact their legislators.
- Supporting international efforts to educate policymakers about FGC and encouraging favorable support for legislation against FGC.
- Continuing to work as a member of The Global Platform to End FGM/C and put forth international advocacy efforts towards increasing funding, programming, and action on FGC at both private and public levels.
- Creating advocacy opportunities at high-level events, with a call to action for UNICEF-UNFPA and other international bodies, to invest further in global anti-FGC efforts beyond the 32 restricted countries currently in UNICEF's data collection.
- Expanding our Policy Internship program to increase the capacity for our work in this programmatic area.



# APPENDIX - PUBLISHED BLOGS

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## United States

- [Sahiyo - United Against Female Genital Cutting - The overturning of Roe v. Wade and its implications for survivors of FGC](#)
- [The United States has a law banning female genital cutting. What now?](#)
- [Texas woman charged for Female Genital Cutting: Sahiyo press statement](#)
- [Gender-Affirming Treatments are not Female Genital Cutting](#)
- [White House Press Release Falsely links Gender Violence \(and FGC\) to Foreign Nationals](#)
- [Sahiyo speaks at the ABA International Law Section Annual Conference](#)
- [Sahiyo presents at the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in Minnesota](#)
- [Proposed legislation in Idaho and Texas discriminates against Transgender Youth and removes protections for children at risk of undergoing FGC](#)

## Massachusetts

- [Massachusetts House passes FGM/C bill](#)
- [Massachusetts Senate passes FGM/C bill](#)
- [PRESS RELEASE: A pioneering Roundtable to Address Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Massachusetts](#)
- [Human Rights Day panel at New England School of Law](#)

## Michigan

- [U.S. Court's dismissal of FGM/C charge in Michigan case is disappointing, but does not condone genital cutting](#)
- [Sahiyo's statement on the Michigan case dismissal on Sep 28, 2021](#)
- [Female Genital Cutting charges dismissed but our work continues: Global reactions to Michigan case news](#)
- [Working Together To Address FGC: Michigan Roundtable](#)
- [Five things you need to know about the controversial court ruling on FGM/C in USA: Sahiyo explains](#)
- [31 US States Now Have Laws Against Female Genital Cutting, But Government Will Not Appeal in the Federal Michigan Case](#)
- [Detroit arrest: It is time for Bohras to get serious about ending Female Genital Cutting](#)

## Connecticut

- [Reflecting on 'Moving Connecticut Ahead: Protecting Girls from FGM/C', a webinar](#)

- [The Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C speaks with the Hartford Times](#)
- [Moving Connecticut ahead: Protecting girls from Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting](#)
- [Legislative Roundtable held in Connecticut to discuss FGC](#)

## Washington

- [Washington State becomes 41st state to pass law against FGM/C](#)
- [Washington State makes progress to end FGM/C](#)
- [A conversation with Washington activist Absa Samba: SB 5453 a product of collaboration and persistence](#)
- [The hearing for Washington Senate Bill 5453 concerning female genital mutilation/cutting](#)
- [Washington SB 5453 moves to the House](#)
- [Washington Senate Bill 5453 concerning female genital mutilation/cutting moves forward in the Senate](#)
- [Washington Senate Bill 5453 moves to House Appropriations Committee](#)
- [My thoughts on the Washington Senate Bill to end FGM/C](#)
- [Washington Coalition hosts educational webinar on female genital cutting](#)

## Global or International

- [Calling for a Global Summit to end FGM/C](#)
- [Joint Press Release: ENDING FGM/C BY 2030: Uniting forces to make FGM/C a practice of the past](#)
- [Op-Ed: A Global Platform to End FGM/C](#)
- [Reflecting on an Israeli Minister's decision to not grant asylum for a woman fleeing female genital mutilation/cutting](#)
- [Is the United Kingdom backing out of its commitment to end female genital cutting amid the COVID-19 pandemic?](#)
- [Finally in the spotlight: Female Genital Cutting is getting national attention in Sri Lanka](#)
- [Khatna and the law, Part 1: Legislative Framework on Female Genital Cutting in Egypt](#)
- [Speak Out on FGM petition to the UN collects more than 500 signatures](#)
- [A reflection on Equality Now's webinar: The impact of laws and use of Multi-Sectoral Approach \(MSA\) to eliminate FGM/C](#)

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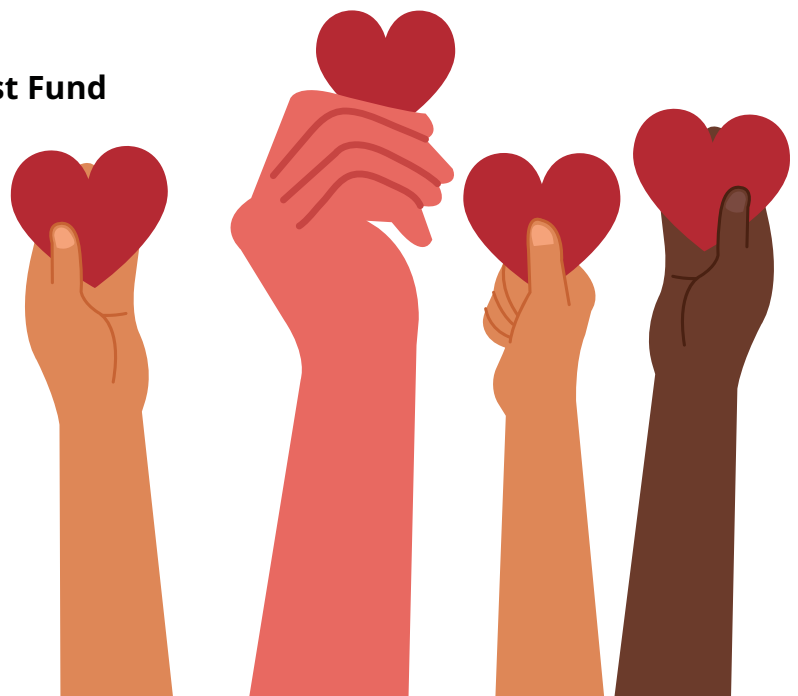
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