

Victim says state needs law against mutilation

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CARSON CITY — Word that female genital mutilation occurs in Nevada coupled with an influx of immigrants are reasons enough for a state law against the practice, a victim told legislators Monday.

Soraya Mire, 35, a Somalian filmmaker who underwent the ritual at 13, told the Senate Human Resources and Assembly Health and Human Services committees that children traveling to this country need protection.

"It happens everywhere," Mire said. "I know of children who were brought to this country when they were 2 and when they turned 9 were taken back to Kenya or Somalia to have it done."

"We're not here to condemn the people but to condemn the act," she added. "It's a human rights issue. Let's protect and give choices to the children."

Female genital mutilation, routine in Africa and the Middle East, is designed to diminish a girl's sexual desire to ensure virginity.

Mire was joined by people representing Planned Parenthood, Soroptomist International, Nevada Women's Lobby, Nevada Nurses Association and others in urging the committees to pass Senate Bill 192, making mutilation a felony.

The bill reaches beyond the federal law promoted by Sen. Harry Reid by making it a felony to take a child out of Nevada to another country to have the ritual performed.

The committees are considering minor amendments to make

the bill more comprehensive. Human Resources Committee Chairman Ray Rawson, R-Las Vegas, said he expects SB192 to pass easily.

Mire's voice faded as she choked back tears while describing the procedure.

"In the mildest form, they put a needle into the fire, and once it's hot, they put it into the clitoris," Mire said. "In the more radical procedures, they cut off the clitoris and stitch the skin around it from the top down, leaving a small hole not bigger than your little finger."

Many girls suffer from infections, problems with urination, menstruation, childbirth and numerous other difficulties associated with the ritual, she said.

Mire showed a clip from her award-winning documentary film "Fire Eyes" in which a teen-age girl undergoes the procedure. Committee members stared blankly as they watched the screaming child being held down by four women while another cuts her with a sharpened stone.

An African man interviewed in the film said men demand that women undergo the procedure before being considered for marriage.

"Would you leave your door unlocked?" he asked. "You trust your woman more when she's stitched. She's private property."

Sandra Jolley of Las Vegas, who helped Reid pass the federal bill and requested the Nevada bill from Rawson, said the federal Centers for Disease Control estimates 150,000 girls are in the United States who have had the ritual done or are at risk.