

## San Francisco split over circumcision

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San Francisco is one of the most colorful cities in America. It's also at front and center in the debate over circumcision.

*"Forced circumcision is fundamentally a human rights violation,"* said Jonathon Conte, who was part of a group that collected more than 7,000 signatures to try to get a ban of circumcision on the ballot in November. *"I feel that all children whether a boy or a girl have a fundamental right to all the body parts that they were born with,"* he said.

The measure would make it a crime to perform circumcision on anyone under 18 years old, resulting in jail time and a \$1,000 fine.

The measure outraged religious groups who see it as a direct attack on their freedoms. Jews and Muslims have joined forces to defend age old traditions

*"This is a hate fueled campaign intended to curtail civil liberties in San Francisco,"* said Abby Porth, associate director for the Jewish Community Relations Council.

She and many others argue it should be a parent's choice. The majority of American men are circumcised and according to the World Health Organization, circumcised men have a lower risk of penile cancer, of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and have a 60 percent lower chance of contracting HIV.

But at the center of this debate is religion.

According to Conte, it's an argument that's not strong enough.

*"Your freedom to practice Religion ends at someone else's body,"* he said. *"Religion is not a blank check to inflict harm upon your children. The vast majority of the world, Central America, South America, new Zealand, Australia, the vast majority of Europe the practice is virtually*

*unheard of,*” Conte said.

Some have taken it a step further. Matthew Hess, the author of the bill, is also the creator of the comic Foreskin Man -a superhero that saves babies from the evil doctors and parents trying to circumcise them.

*“This comic book has some of the most disgusting, vile, anti-Semitic images that appear to be lifted out of Nazi era propaganda,”* said Abby Porth, associate director for the Jewish Community Relations Council. *“The idea that Foreskin man is an Aryan looking super hero who’s going to come and save babies from the evil Jewish blood-thirsty rabbi is disgusting.”* On Thursday, Superior Court Judge Loretta Giorgi said the law falls in the hands in the state of California and not the city of San Francisco because medical procedures a function of the state, not cities.

The measure may be off the ballot but it certainly ignited discussion that reached beyond the borders of San Francisco and into the national spotlight. Catherine Schneider of Community Engagement of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles says the choice to decide is very important.

*“This is a diverse community,”* said Schneider. *“We recognize that parents get to make decisions for their children.”* That decisions, she said, is one that is both religious and health-related, and that parents should have the right to opt one way or another and take into account advice from their family, doctors and clergy.

*“We respect those that choose not to circumcise their sons,”* added Schneider. *“This is really about parental choice.”*