

Norm Cohen
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March 9, 2021

Re: House Bill 4399 HHS Appropriation Act

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Norm Cohen, and I am the Executive Director of NOCIRC of Michigan, Inc., a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization of health care professionals and children's health activists. We educate parents and health care providers about infant circumcision.

The State is spending over \$2.6 million a year paying for over 21,000 medically unnecessary, non-therapeutic, elective surgeries, namely, infant circumcisions.

Across our nation, 14 states have eliminated Medicaid coverage for infant circumcisions: Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Since 1996, infant circumcision has not been a publicly insured service throughout Canada.

The decision to drop coverage in these states has always been based on the lack of *valid* medical indications for the procedure. Routine circumcision is not recommended by any national medical health organization in the world. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has defined circumcision performed at parental request as elective surgery (ICD-9-CM V50.2). The United States Congress appropriates Medicaid funds to states *only* for medically necessary services (42 U.S.C. 1396 (1)).

Social, cultural, religious, and ethnic traditions are the primary factors—and not medical ones—that parents cite when making the decision to circumcise their newborn babies. The *American Academy of Pediatrics* and the *American Medical Association* have declined to recommend it as a routine practice.

As a result, the national circumcision rate has now dropped to 55%. This is evidence that this surgery is not an essential component of newborn care. When nearly half of today's parents are not choosing circumcision, it can no longer be defended as the standard of care in the United States.

In Michigan, however, Medicaid-funded coverage implies an endorsement of routine circumcision when no such endorsement actually exists. Not surprisingly, the circumcision rate is higher in Michigan than in other parts of the United States. Why would a young and uninformed parent decline to accept something offered by a doctor for free? Why would a doctor not recommend it when he is certain to get Medicaid reimbursement for it?

Circumcision is the only surgery performed on children without a diagnosis, and it is the most common one performed on them. Circumcision performed at parental request is something other than medicine, and it cannot stand up to objective budget scrutiny because it cannot meet Medicaid's criteria of "medically necessary."

Our surveys of physicians in Michigan show that they often do not take the time to obtain the *informed* consent of parents, relying simply on how the parents want their baby boy to “look”. Parents make the decision to circumcise based on appearance, not health. Parents request this surgery for reasons not having to do with Medicaid’s real mission of delivering essential medical services to the needy.

It is entirely reasonable for Michigan taxpayers to expect that our state limit its Medicaid dollars to necessary and cost-effective medical care. Furthermore, it harms the poor to allocate money for an unnecessary procedure while genuine healthcare and prevention needs go unmet. Parents who want to circumcise their children can pay for this surgery, just as they would for any other cosmetic surgery. Even now, *Medicaid does not cover circumcisions that are performed for religious reasons.*

It is entirely reasonable that the State of Michigan insist on limiting its Medicaid dollars to *real* medical care. The savings will enable Medicaid to provide over \$2.6 million more every year in better healthcare and prevention services for Michigan’s children.

In conclusion, rational decision-making must prevail. Please don’t waste taxpayers’ money on medically unnecessary procedures. Please make sure that free circumcisions are no longer provided in the budget of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Respectfully submitted,

Norm Cohen
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NOCIRC of Michigan, Inc.

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For more information on this issue, please see:

“Is Circumcision a Fraud?”

Peter W. Adler, JD, Robert Van Howe, M.D., Travis Wisdom, MA, LLM

Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy

<https://www.circumcisionisafraud.com>