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## New Anti-Circumcision Tactic—Target the Poor

The high rate of newborn circumcision in the United States (U.S.) continues in spite of the dominance of activist anti-circumcision groups in the media and on the Internet over the past 25 years. Clinical research indicates that about 80% of middle class American males are circumcised. Among this group percentages vary from 76% in San Francisco to 92% in a Wisconsin city, and include those circumcised as newborns as well as later in life. Statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics discouraging newborn circumcision seem to have had no effect on the public. A published survey from Southern California showed parents choosing circumcision were later more satisfied by their decision than those who left their infants uncircumcised. Low circumcision rates from certain parts of the country, particularly in California, reflect the large number of immigrants, particularly Hispanics, in these areas. Most immigrants to the U.S., particularly Hispanics and Asians, come from cultures where circumcision is not performed. More than half of newborns in California are now Hispanics, so it is apparent that even if 100% of non-immigrant boys were circumcised the State rate would be under 50%.

Since the anti-circumcision groups have been unsuccessful in decreasing circumcision among the middle class in the U.S. (in mid-Western states the newborn circumcision rate has actually increased to over 80% over the past 20 years), they have turned their attention to the most vulnerable and defenseless population group – poor children. Parents on welfare have no political or economic power, and are at the mercy of State bureaucracies and legislatures for decisions on the medical care of their children. Knowing this, 22 anti-circumcision groups have banded together and formed a lobbying organization – the International Coalition of Genital

Integrity (ICGI) – which has been pressuring State legislatures to eliminate newborn circumcision coverage for Medicaid recipients. The argument that eliminating payment for newborn circumcision would save money has resonated with legislative bodies faced with increasing budgetary deficits. Over the past few years this callous, insensitive activism has been successful, and 13 states now refuse to pay for newborn circumcision for welfare recipients regardless of the parents wishes. These include Arizona, California, Florida, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

With the great majority of mainstream, middle class boys in the U.S. being circumcised, an uncircumcised boy in this country is marked as either an immigrant, a son of recent immigrants or a child of poverty (with the exception of a few middle class followers of the anti-circ movement) . To cope with this social disadvantage of the foreskin, some poor parents, sadly and courageously, have scraped together enough money to pay for newborn circumcision from their meager assets, in order to give their sons the appearance of mainstream American boys.

The anti-circumcision groups argue that by agreeing to have their newborn sons circumcised parents are robbing the infants of their human rights. In a brazen example of hypocrisy they apparently feel that newborns themselves should have the right to choose or refuse circumcision, but poor parents should not.

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