

New California law bars bans on circumcision

by [Nicole Neroulis](#) in the [November 15, 2011](#) issue

Jews, Muslims and their allies cheered recently as California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill prohibiting all local bans on circumcision, making it illegal for local authorities to restrict the medical or religious practice.

Anticircumcision activists had gathered enough signatures to place the issue on the ballot in San Francisco. Voters would have been asked to decide if infant circumcision should be banned as an unnecessary genital mutilation, a misdemeanor punishable by a \$1,000 fine and up to a year in jail.

A coalition of religious, medical and civil liberties groups sued to stop the proposal; a judge blocked the initiative in July, noting that only the state can regulate a widespread medical procedure. The new statewide law signed October 2 prevents further efforts to ban circumcision by cities or counties.

The U.S. circumcision rate is falling, from 85 percent in 1965 for newborn boys in hospitals to 57 percent in 2008, according to the National Hospital Discharge Survey.

Jews and Muslims continue to circumcise boys for religious reasons, and other Americans opt for the procedure based on aesthetics, hygiene or medical reasons. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics neither recommends nor discourages infant circumcision, citing "insufficient data." —RNS