Libertarian Party of Iowa
Annual State Convention Address
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
October 12, 1997

Good-morning Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers, commonly known as NOCIRC, and the NOCIRC of Iowa branch, I want to thank the Executive Committee for this opportunity to speak to you on the subject of circumcision.

This is an historic occasion because it is the first time in U.S. history that one of our political parties has considered the subject of circumcision in an official meeting, and it is appropriate that it should take place within the Libertarian Party, the party that claims the political philosophy which values, promotes, and protects individual freedoms. You can also be proud that Iowa is the founding state of the first American politically-associated organization addressing this individual rights issue, that being Libertarians for Intact Rights of Children and Adults.

It has been said that "until all are free, none of us really is." Well, not all of us are yet free, as we know, and liberty has always required the close watch of dedicated and socially conscious people to not only preserve freedoms gained, but to knock down the walls of restraint and apathy necessary to advance the reaches of freedom.

I hope that you are not too sensitive about talking plainly about male genitalia, because part of this social problem which must be addressed in this country has to do with taboo associations from our past. Without the puritan sexual values instilled into our social fabric, we might have come to the point of creating a movement to save our children sooner.

As a mother I am very concerned about the violence and abuse to our neonatal sons resulting from circumcision. I realize that the taboos which make it difficult to discuss circumcision have had a detrimental effect on efforts to educate people about the damaging effects of this procedure. Ken Derifield, editor of the "Intact Network" newsletter wrote in the March 1997 issue: "Education is the most important tool we have to expose the myths and enlighten the unaware that leaving Nature's design alone is the answer to the circumcision question. We must guarantee our children the basic human right to genital integrity, to physical, sexual and psychological wholeness. [Education will teach parents why they must defend the sanctity of their child's healthy, functional, erogenous and protective body parts. It is right, it is natural and it is their body. Commitment to educating parents-to-be, families, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and any others is basic to winning this battle for the voiceless."

It should be difficult for Libertarians to comprehend the approval of gender related double standards on freedom issues, but we have it relative

to this social problem. While internationally NOCIRC is concerned with sexual mutilations of both genders, in discussing this issue in America, we talk mostly about male circumcision, for we have strong laws protecting females from this sexual abuse. Why there is no equal protection for males, I and many others cannot understand. Focus has to be moved to the rights of the baby boys to their whole bodies with all healthy body parts left intact for self-determination. Where in the Constitution is there an age designation for turning on civil rights and equal protection under the law. That female circumcision is physically more gruesome than male circumcision does not make male circumcision a benign procedure. Even one "little snip" without the benefit of informed consent on the part of the individual is abuse. Actually, we do have legislation in every state which should protect both genders from genital mutilation. These laws cover mayhem toward other humans, and circumcision meets every requirement for this definition. That is why this subject will require special legislation to make a correction, just as other obvious social issues have. You are probably aware of states that have made it legally impossible for women who were breastfeeding their babies in public to be harrassed or accused of public indecency. These are similar situations in that it is painfully obvious what is right and natural and what is wrong, if only we could all get past the taboos and other social indoctrinations.

When volunteers with NOCIRC speak to audiences on the subject of genital mutilation, there are always the uninformed, the skeptics, the opponents, and those who will favor knocking down the walls defending other areas of oppressed society, but who may feel inclined to protect the walls of this particular oppression. There are also those who will "see the light" and want to know more and then go on to help in whatever way possible. That is the Libertarian spirit: to reach down with a helping hand and a vote to lift up and free the oppressed. In this case, the oppressed are our infant boys.

Our speakers can observe the faces of some who turn off their interest which would open the channel to reason and rationality about a subject heretofore filed under indifference. Apathy and denial are the greatest enemies our newborn males face as they are put at risk simply by being born male in the U.S. I am asking each of you to set aside your passive acceptance of this cruel and brutal form of child abuse and consider facts and ideas to which you may not have previously given attention.

Volunteers with NOCIRC are internationally trailblazing as we erode the false foundations of the status quo. As we address the issue of denial, that psychological trait of the mind which shields us from guilt and conscience, we realize it is epidemic in our society, and understandably so. No man wants to know he has been genitally harmed unnecessarily, and no woman wants to admit she has consented to have her precious baby injured. Circumcision is a prime example of the old adage, "Tell a lie often enough, loudly enough, and long enough, and it will come to be believed as a fact. The abnormal can be made to look normal and the normal to appear abnormal." The fact that the male of every species of mammal is provided naturally with this functional tissue is disregarded, despite the fact that it has lifelong functions.

As we talk about denial, we must consider what Dr. Thomas Ritter writes in his excellent book Say No To Circumcision: "Circumcised men are by the very

state of their penises trapped into a biased position. Everyone wants to think they're 'fine,' especially when it comes to those attributes that they cannot change. The penis is the typical man's most cherished physical possession. To admit that it is not all that it could be takes a great deal of soul searching and intellectual honesty. And this admission brings on deep feelings of anger and frustration, because the deficiency is not natural but was inflicted at birth by a misguided physician and ill-informed parents. Denial is a common defense mechanism. Maybe it's most common of all among circumcised men." Dr. George Denniston says, "I have the greatest respect for those fathers who, having been circumcised themselves, refuse to have it done to their sons." And finally, Ronald Goldman, author of Circumcision: The Hidden Trauma, writes: "This deep unwillingness to honestly look at the issue of circumcision on the part of its victims may be the most profound of all psychological effects. This avoidance reaction finds a close parallel among women who will not or cannot talk about childhood experiences of violent rape or other sexual abuse."

Indeed, Marilyn Milos, founder and director of NOCIRC, explains what began her crusade to bring an end to circumcision. "When I worked as a nurse at the hospital, nurses were required to rub the genitals of a baby boy with Betadine solution for five minutes prior to the circumcision. In every case, the penile tissue responded to stimuli as it was designed to, with erection. This is what led me to say that circumcision is when sex and violence meet for the first time. This is the baby's first shared sexual experience. Every circumcision is sexual child abuse, battery, and a violation of human rights."

On a positive note, it is interesting that among the Jewish community there is increasingly strong support for the NOCIRC movement, more so than from the Christian community, which has the New Testament charge that circumcision is of the spirit, not of the flesh. In fact, there is a new pro-intact organization in the heart of Israel attracting Jewish parents concerned about the physical harm of the bris to their sons and urging reform of the ritual.

Betty Katz Sperlich, at the Third International Symposium on Circumcision in Washington, D.C., in May 1994 released a statement to the press which read: "After the years of shame, acting as an accomplice, I am proud to be here today as an R.N. conscientious objector to infant circumcision. I'm proud to be here today as a patient advocate for the babies. I'm proud to be here as a Jew, as a woman and feminist, and as a human rights activist. And most of all, I'm proud to be here as a human being with the courage to hear the screams of the babies and to follow my conscience."

Dr. Thomas Szasz, at this same symposium, said, "I believe the time has come to acknowledge that the practice of routine circumcision rests on the absurd premise that the only mammal in creation born in the condition that requires immediate surgical correction is the human male."

Wayne Goodman, R.N., and Jew, speaks of "an irrational tradition." He says, "If asked why I've turned away from Judaism, I explain it's mutilation of babies. I have an unnecessary scar that I'll bear the rest of my life because my parents chose to perpetuate an outdated tribal marking ritual. I've decided not to be angry at my parents, but rather at

society as a whole, that perpetuates this sadistic ritual for its own sense of misguided moralism."

When Joseph Lewis wrote his book The Ten Commandments fifty years ago, his analysis of the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue is what began his activism on behalf of infant boys. "Because of her sexual nature, woman became taboo as far as holy things were concerned, and the only way to avoid the direful consequences of having come in contact with her was by a blood sacrifice to free the victim from having been polluted. As a direct result of this superstitious belief, circumcision came into existence among the early Hebrews as a blood sacrifice. It was a blood sacrifice on behalf of the boy to cleanse himself of the contamination of having come in contact with the mother's 'uncleanliness'."

Dr. George Denniston, president of Doctors Opposing Circumcision, with members in all states and many foreign countries, says, "With the founding of this non-profit organization, the misinformation from the medical profession will be met with the facts about this practice from the same profession that has been perpetuating it. DOC is committed to telling the whole truth about this tragic practice until it is eradicated from the American scene."

R. Wayne Griffiths, M.S., M.Ed., is director of the National Organization of Restoring Men, a national support organization for circumcision victims, which consults with the growing numbers of men concerning non-surgical procedures to reconstruct their foreskins and gain the sensory benefits as well as personal self-esteem which was denied them.

David Llewellyn and Steve Svoboda, two attorneys, are among those pioneering the legal profession in supplying legal recourse for young men who were genitally violated by foreskin amputation as babies. Attorneys for the Rights of Children (ARC) plans a lawsuit on the basis of discrimination against the federal law which protects females but not males.

You would not be meeting today if you were not aware of an established public agenda in control of the mass mind and if you did not have an insight into social standards which could and should improve the status of individual rights in our great nation. The phrase, "Come, let us reason together," has particular significance to Libertarians as debate takes place. However, getting all minds in a given group to agree is more of an ideal than a common fact. It has been said that social change requires many things, among which are many funerals. But history has a way of showing us that what was once defended as a written-in-stone truth was, in fact, in error. It was Mark Twain who said, "Often the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it. We in NOCIRC do not make these speeches to confront; we make them to educate and to inform.

Iowa Libertarians may not have heard much if anything about this social problem because use of the media for these purposes has been hampered by statewide newspaper censorship. Updated information which would rescue so many Iowa baby boys and teach parents how to better protect their sons than earlier parents knew to do is not made available to the public in this ultra conservative state.

NOCIRC believes that circumcision is not a parental rights issue, not a health issue, not a religious issue ... it is a human rights issue, and for that reason all Libertarians should be greatly concerned and take action for change. There is evidence coming out relating early childhood trauma to long-term effects on the central nervous system, as well as influencing negative social behavior of men toward women and society in general. Also thought is that the earlier the trauma, the greater the degree of later maladjustment. We are all concerned about the advance of crime in the streets, drug abuse, etc., but carelessly ignore the early violence of circumcision as one of the possible causes of these problems. Dr. Frederick Leboyer, a prominent French obstetrician, now deceased, said, "Once we remember that all that takes place during the first days of life on the emotional level shapes the pattern of all future reactions, we cannot but wonder why such a torture has been inflicted on the child." Joseph Lewis was also concerned about the psychological consequences of circumcision. In his book In the Name of Humanity, he wrote: "The evils and dangers of circumcision are not only in the mutilation of an important organ of the body and the unnecessary pain inflicted upon the infant, but the hidden and not easily detected injuries are in many instances far more serious and menacing than those more readily discernable. These are the injuries resulting from the shock to the nervous system." He soundly condemned the practice when he asked, "Is there, in the catalogue of man's stupidity, a more perverse act?"

There is an increasing amount of literature and data being written about circumcision, but only a minor portion of it addresses the civil liberties violation aspect of the problem. NOCIRC of Iowa has strongly kept this foremost in its work and recommends the Libertarian Party of Iowa assist our baby boys by building this spark into a national party flame. We urge you to make the human rights aspect of genital mutilation/circumcision a plank in the state party platform and work to establish the same at the national level. Nationwide, NOCIRC and its affiliated organizations have managed to reduce the percentage of neonatal foreskin amputations from 90 percent to almost 50 percent. We congratulate all the parents who have had the courage to face the issue and the fact that they have harmed their young sons through ignorance and following the false advice from the so-called authorities in the past and have chosen to protect male babies from this point on. Nevertheless, a stand taken by a political party such of the Libertarian Party would bring this issue to the public's eye more expeditiously.

It's a strong Libertarian note to remember that NOCIRC has no argument with an adult male who makes the conscious choice to have himself circumcised. Our concern regards those children who are mutilated without choice and without medical need, and of course, with the adults who consent and do the cutting. We fault our churches and clergy for remaining passively silent, for they are failing to rectify and accept proper blame for their part in originating and perpetuating this cruelty to children.

Shocking to many is the lucrative medical practice of selling neonatal foreskins. This makes baby boys the only citizens forced into organ donation. Shouldn't this be left to the dead and to consenting adults? Furthermore, it retards a physician's incentive to cease performing circumcisions.

Though adult circumcision does not have the frequency problem that infant circumcision has, NOCIRC does work on behalf of unconsenting adults also, and primarily this is associated with the military. Bill Hines of Pennsylvania was surprised to awaken from surgery to repair serious wounds and remove shrapnel from his body, none of which involved his genitals, only to find he had also been circumcised. NOCIRC asks, Hadn't Bill given enough of his body to his country without unnecessarily and without consent losing part of his genitals, with which he had lived happily all his life?

There is one invariable rule you should carefully note: never, ever forcibly retract a young boy's foreskin. This is a major cause of damage to the glans. The formation of scar tissue, which may readhere the foreskin in an abnormal manner, can lead to a tendency for urinary tract infections, which men then often complain about for many years, all because some misinformed person forced their foreskin back prematurely. Even so, there are far more urinary tract infections in women than in men, and use of antibiotics is a much better, simpler, and inexpensive answer than surgery.

We hear about women objecting to the appearance of the normal penis with its natural foreskin. This is a natural reaction to seeing something which is unfamiliar. But Russell Zangger of Larchwood, Iowa, and director of The INTACT ORGANization, has a file of letters from women who have had sexual experience with both intact and circumcised men and state their preference for intact sexual partners.

A couple of years ago NOCIRC of Iowa received a dozen letters from high school seniors and college freshmen from Decatur, Iowa, who were full of resentment and felt cheated that they had been mutilated as babies. John Sawkey of Canada and director of Medical Ethics Network, is a retired high school principal. He had a group of high school seniors come to him with the same complaint. Some of them showed outward signs of distrust and dislike of women, and one admitted hating his mother for allowing his genital disfigurement. They urged him to do something to stop this mutilation. John says that this was his motivation to found the organization upon retirement, and he has led a successful program to attain the cessation of government payment for male circumcision in all but one province.

England ceased support for male circumcision years ago and the amputations dropped to a very minimal number immediately. Australia's NOCIRC movement is receiving increasingly strong support from its government and has much success in educating the public. They also have media support for their educational effort. Scandinavian physicians take the definite position that circumcision is sexually harmful. The only study on delayed circumcision complications that has been conducted so far was done in Canada. It found that out of 100 cases, 24 developed problems. John Money, Ph.D., states: "Even when the operative procedure ... in neonatal male circumcision is performed with sterilized instruments and dressings in a modern hospital, morbidity is prevalent to a degree that would not be legally tolerated in test trials of any new clinical procedure. Increasingly, the term genital mutilation is being used to apply to the practices of circumcision."

I have heard that some of you are concerned about scientific evidence that circumcision should be abolished. Ronald Goldman writes about this issue in Chapter 4 of his book: "The atmosphere of denial and suppression surrounding the issue of circumcision has had a stifling effect on research concerning the long-term impact of the practice. The suggestion for research on long-term effects of circumcision had been made and virtually nobody responded. Why? The answer may be a combination of cultural and emotional factors." One reason cited is, "the overspecialization of professional practice. Circumcision is a medical procedure, and the medical community is generally not trained in or sensitive to the psychological ramifications of its work. Conversely, mental health professionals generally do not look at routine medical procedures in infancy as a possible cause of adult psychopathology." Further, "Research on the long-term effects of circumcision involves potentially inhibiting emotional factors connected with one's own circumcision. Investigators typically study individuals and groups that exclude themselves. This is consistent with the traditional scientific idea of the 'objective' observer and also provides a safe emotional distance from subjects. However, in the case of circumcision, most of the investigators are themselves circumcised. In addition, many work in professions and institutions that carry out circumcisions routinely. Investigating the negative long-term effects of circumcision could become personally, professionally, and culturally uncomfortable. Such a study could call the practice into question, a threatening possibility for researchers and grant providers that is safer to avoid than confront. That virtually nobody is willing to study the long-term psychological impact of circumcision is itself a long-term consequence of circumcision." Mr. Goldman concludes with: "Finally, and most important, there is very little public awareness yet of any problem here. It is tacitly assumed that circumcised men are either glad or do not care that they are circumcised, and that there is no connection between their present psychological state and the fact that they have been circumcised." Unfortunately, for these reasons, it may be awhile before it is scientifically verified that circumcision causes long-term psychological harm. We would hope, however, that people do not wait for scientific confirmation of what should be obvious: circumcision unnecessarily mutilates innocent babies, causes extreme pain, and has no medical value whatsoever. Why inflict this pain and loss? There is no rational answer.

I know that some of you may have questions come to mind later, and I invite you to send your questions to NOCIRC of lowa/Ankeny, 405 SE Delaware #208, Ankeny, Iowa 50021, or to me at NOCIRC of Iowa/Collins, 413 4th Avenue, Collins, Iowa 50055. NOCIRC volunteers are working in such a vast knowledge-starved environment that energy must be carefully directed toward "fertile fields." We know by the rapid growth of the movement that there are many people out there who are ready and waiting for correct information on this subject.

I have brought with me a video documentary which will provide additional information. However, due to time constraints, we will not be able to view the entire video. For anyone who wishes to see the video in its entirety, information is available on how to obtain this award-winning documentary.

On behalf of NOCIRC of Iowa, I thank you for your attention.

NOCIRC