



NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER



With help from the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

FORCED STERILIZATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES

NOTES ABOUT THIS REPORT

PLAIN LANGUAGE

We wrote this report in Plain Language. Plain Language is a style that is more accessible to many people. These include some people with intellectual disabilities. Forced sterilization happens to people with intellectual disabilities more than anyone else. And people with intellectual disabilities have important things to say about forced sterilization.

Everyone should get to understand information about issues that affect them. But nondisabled people often talk about forced sterilization in a way that leaves out people with intellectual disabilities. Using Plain Language helps change that.

IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE

In this report, we usually say “disabled people” instead of “people with disabilities.” This is called identity-first language. Many disabled advocates like identity-first language better. You can find more about identity-first language [here](#). But we also say “people with intellectual disabilities.” This is how many people with intellectual disabilities like to describe themselves.

WHAT TO EXPECT

A lot of this report will talk about times when judges, doctors, family members, and other people hurt disabled people. This will include talking about sexual violence. Sexual violence is when someone gets hurt in a sexual way.

This report uses information from laws and court decisions. Some of these laws and decisions use hurtful language about disabled people.

Sometimes it is hard to read about these topics. You might want to take breaks while reading this report. You can ask someone you trust to check on you while you are reading. You might want to wait until you feel okay before you read more.

THANK YOU

The National Women's Law Center wrote this report with help from the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network.

Thank you to everyone who helped us with this report. Max Barrows, Lydia Brown, Sam Crane, Tia Nelis, and Karen Willis reviewed this report. The law firm Covington & Burling LLP helped with research.

DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE FOUGHT TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS FOR MANY YEARS.

They have fought to make decisions about their bodies and having babies. But many laws still take that decision away from them. These include laws about sterilization.

Sterilization is an operation or procedure that stops someone from ever having babies. Disabled people should get to decide if they are sterilized or not. But in some cases, laws say that a doctor can sterilize a disabled person even when that person does not want it. **This report is about laws that let doctors sterilize disabled people against their will.**

Some people think that forced sterilization only happened in the past. But most states have laws that allow forced sterilization today. These laws exist in 31 states plus Washington, D.C.

We do not know how many disabled people get sterilized under these laws. When disabled people are forced to be sterilized, they do not always get to share their story with the world. This report is about one part of the story: ***the laws that let forced sterilization happen.***

1 WHAT IS FORCED STERILIZATION?

Sterilization is an operation that stops you from getting pregnant or having babies. Sterilization is supposed to be permanent. So if you get sterilized, you usually cannot undo it.

One type of sterilization is **tubal ligation**. It is also called “getting your tubes tied.” Another type of sterilization is a hysterectomy. A **hysterectomy** also stops someone from having periods.

Sometimes people want to be sterilized. People might want to be sterilized because they know they do not want babies. If someone wants a sterilization, they should be able to get it. No one should make it hard for them. The important thing is that they are making the decision.

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