



NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER



With help from the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

FORCED STERILIZATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES

Many laws take away disabled people's rights to make decisions about their bodies and having babies.

These include laws about sterilization.

Sterilization is a procedure that stops someone from ever having babies. Disabled people should get to decide if they are sterilized or not. But laws in many states say that sometimes a doctor can sterilize a disabled person even when that person does not want it. These laws let judges, along with other people like family members or guardians, make the decision for the disabled person. This is called **forced sterilization**.

There are many laws in the United States that allow forced sterilization of disabled people. **Today, 31 states and Washington, D.C., have laws allowing forced sterilization of disabled people.**

Under these laws, a judge can decide whether to sterilize someone. This happens when the judge thinks the disabled person cannot make the decision on their own. The judge can order the sterilization if they think it is the best choice for the disabled person.

Some people say that these laws are not bad, because they are meant to help disabled people. They say that sterilization means a person does not need to worry about getting pregnant or having children. But taking away this choice can hurt disabled people for the rest of their lives.

Forced sterilization takes away disabled people's control over their bodies. It takes away their ability to make decisions about having children. It is just one example of the many ways that lots of disabled people do not get to make these basic decisions.

We need to come up with new laws. These laws should let disabled people make decisions about important things like whether to be sterilized. We need big changes, and disabled people can lead the way.



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