

## Virginia to compensate victims of state's forced sterilization program

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**Virginia lawmakers have passed a measure in which those who were forcibly sterilized are to be awarded \$25,000 each. Many view the measure as formal recognition of the injustice inherent in the program.**

*By Cristina Maza, Staff writer, February 27, 2015*

***Virginia's forced sterilization victims will receive \$25,000 compensation. WWBT - Richmond, VA***



Virginia lawmakers approved a measure Thursday to compensate people forcibly sterilized under a eugenics program that was in place for much of the 20th century.

More than 8,000 Virginians underwent procedures between the 1920s and 1970s as part of a movement that sought to improve the genetic makeup of humankind by preventing those considered "defective" from reproducing. Scientists have now discredited eugenics as a flawed theory that has been misused for political purposes.

Under the measure, which is now being considered by Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe, at least 11 survivors from Virginia are to be awarded \$25,000 each in compensation. Many view the measure as formal acknowledgment of the injustice inherent in the program.

"I think it's a recognition when we do something wrong we need to fix it as a government," [Reuters](#) quoted Delegate Patrick Hope (D) as saying. "Now we can close this final chapter and healing can begin."

In 2002 Mark Warner, then governor of Virginia, issued a formal [apology](#) for the state's decision to forcibly sterilize thousands of its residents.

However, the battle for compensation wasn't launched until about a decade later. Delegate Benjamin Cline, a conservative Republican from Rockbridge County, and Delegate Hope, a liberal Democrat from Arlington County, introduced the bipartisan bill to compensate the victims.

"There was a growing consensus that we needed to act while we still had the opportunity to look these people in the eye and acknowledge the wrong that was committed against them so many years ago," Delegate Cline said, according to the Associated Press.

Although Cline says that no amount of money is sufficient to right the wrong that was committed, he sees Thursday's move as symbolic.

Some of the victims said the news was welcome.

"I think they done me wrong," Lewis Reynolds, one of the men forcibly sterilized, told [AP](#). "I couldn't have a family like everybody else does. They took my rights away."

Mr. Reynolds was one of many victims who did not discover that he had been sterilized until he was married and trying to start a family many years later. The majority of victims visited a doctor for another procedure and were sterilized without their knowledge.

Virginia's sterilization program was passed into law in 1924, the same year that the legislature adopted the Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited interracial marriages. More than a fifth of those sterilized were African-American and two-thirds were women, [the BBC reported](#).

Also among the victims were people diagnosed with psychiatric disorders and those considered social misfits. Many victims were patients at state mental institutions, and some were homeless people who were sterilized to reduce poverty figures.

Reynolds, for example, was sterilized because his doctors believed he was epileptic. It was concluded later that he was demonstrating only temporary symptoms because of a head injury.

About 65,000 Americans were sterilized in 33 US states during the past century. Most operations stopped in 1974 after a controversial case in Alabama prompted a federal lawsuit. Scholars say the American eugenics program was the model that Nazi leader Adolf Hitler adopted to pursue the creation of a master race.

Virginia is the second state to approve compensation for victims of sterilization. In 2013, North Carolina legislators agreed to allocate \$10 million in compensation to 1,800 individuals.