

State of Vermont House of Representatives



Montpelier, Vermont

Joint House Resolution

J.R.H. 2

Joint resolution sincerely apologizing and expressing sorrow and regret to all individual Vermonters and their families and descendants who were harmed as a result of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and practices

Offered by: Representatives Killacky of South Burlington, Ancel of Calais, Anthony of Barre City, Birong of Vergennes, Bluemle of Burlington, Brown of Richmond, Brumsted of Shelburne, Cina of Burlington, Coffey of Guilford, Colston of Winooski, Copeland Hanzas of Bradford, Cordes of Lincoln, Dolan of Essex, Dolan of Waitsfield, Donahue of Northfield, Donnally of Hyde Park, Durfee of Shaftsbury, Gannon of Wilmington, Grad of Moretown, Hooper of Montpelier, Houghton of Essex, James of Manchester, Jerome of Brandon, Kornheiser of Brattleboro, Lippert of Hinesburg, Masland of Thetford, Mrowicki of Putney, Ode of Burlington, Partridge of Windham, Patt of Worcester, Pugh of South Burlington, Scheu of Middlebury, Sheldon of Middlebury, Sims of Craftsbury, Small of Winooski, Stevens of Waterbury, Till of Jericho, Townsend of South Burlington, Troiano of Stannard, Walz of Barre City, Webb of Shelburne, White of Hartford, Wood of Waterbury, and Yantachka of Charlotte

~~Whereas, in 1925, University of Vermont zoology professor Henry F. Perkins established the discredited Eugenics Survey of Vermont to measure evidence of alleged delinquency, dependency, and mental defectiveness, and this survey targeted members of Abenaki bands, Vermonters of mixed racial or French-Canadian heritage, the poor, and persons with disabilities, and~~

~~Whereas, the General Assembly adopted 1931 Acts and Resolves No. 174 (Act 174), "An Act for Human Betterment by Voluntary Sterilization," for the purpose of eliminating from the future Vermont genetic pool persons deemed mentally unfit to procreate, and~~

~~Whereas, Act 174 resulted in the sterilization of Vermonters, and whether these individuals provided informed consent can be questioned, and~~

~~Whereas, this State-sanctioned eugenics policy was not an isolated example of oppression, but reflected the historic marginalization, discriminatory treatment, and displacement of these targeted groups in Vermont, and~~

~~Whereas, eugenics advocates promoted sterilization for the protection of Vermont's "old stock" and to preserve the physical and social environment of Vermont for their children, and~~

~~Whereas, the Eugenics Survey advocated for assistance from State and municipal officials, and the resulting sterilization intruded on the lives of its victims and had devastating and irreversible impacts on the directly affected individuals and their families, and~~

~~Whereas, in conducting the Eugenics Survey, the surveyors were granted access to case files from State agencies and institutions, and the files were~~

~~made available to police departments, social workers, educators, and town officials, and~~

~~Whereas, as a result of the opening of these files, children were removed from families, individuals were institutionalized or incarcerated, family connections were severed, and the sense of kinship and community was lost, and~~

~~Whereas, on June 21, 2019, the University of Vermont issued a formal statement of sincere apology for its “unethical and regrettable” eugenics role, and the General Assembly, on behalf of the State of Vermont, should issue a similar apology, now therefore be it~~

~~Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:~~

~~That the General Assembly sincerely apologizes and expresses its sorrow and regret to all individual Vermonters and their families and descendants who were harmed as a result of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and practices, and be it further~~

~~Resolved: That the General Assembly recognizes that further legislative action should be taken to address the continuing impact of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and related practices of disenfranchisement and ethnocide leading to genocide.~~

~~Whereas, State institutions established in the 19th century, including the Vermont State Hospital for the Insane and the Vermont Reform School, became settings for the implementation of eugenics policies, and~~

~~Whereas, in 1912, the intent of the General Assembly to develop policies that in later years would be identified as the practice of eugenics was manifested with the passage of the subsequently vetoed S.79 of 1912, “An act to authorize and provide for the sterilization of imbeciles, feeble-minded, and insane persons, rapists, confirmed criminals and other defectives” and through the enactment of Acts and Resolves No. 81 of 1912, “An act to provide for the care, training and education of feeble-minded children,” the law authorizing the Brandon Training School, which opened in 1915, and~~

~~Whereas, in 1925, University of Vermont zoology professor Henry F. Perkins established the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, with the participation of leaders within Vermont State government, to collect evidence of Vermonters alleged delinquency, dependency, and deficiency, and~~

~~Whereas, State-sanctioned eugenics policies targeted Vermonters of Native American Indian heritage, including French-Indian and Abenaki families, and persons of mixed ethnicity and of French-Canadian heritage, as well as the poor and persons with disabilities, among others, and~~

~~Whereas, in 1927, S.59 “An act related to Voluntary Eugenic Sterilization” passed the Senate but was defeated in the House, and~~

~~Whereas, the General Assembly adopted 1931 Acts and Resolves No. 174 (Act 174) “An Act for Human Betterment by Voluntary Sterilization,” for the purpose of eliminating from the future Vermont genetic pool persons deemed mentally unfit to procreate, and~~

~~Whereas, Act 174 resulted in the sterilization of Vermonters, and whether these individuals provided informed consent can be questioned, and~~

~~Whereas, this State-sanctioned eugenics policy was not an isolated example of oppression, but reflected the historic marginalization, discriminatory treatment, and displacement of these targeted groups in Vermont, and~~

~~Whereas, eugenics advocates promoted sterilization for the protection of Vermont’s “old stock” and to preserve the physical and social environment of Vermont for their children, and~~

~~Whereas, the Eugenics Survey received assistance from State and municipal officials, individuals, and private organizations, and the resulting sterilization, institutionalization, and separation policies intruded on the lives of its victims and had devastating and irreversible impacts that still persist in the lives of the targeted groups and especially the descendants of those who were directly impacted, and~~

~~*Whereas, in conducting the Eugenics Survey, the surveyors were granted access to case files from State agencies and institutions, and the files were made available to persons of authority, including police departments, social workers, educators, and town officials, and*~~

~~*Whereas, as a result of the opening of these files, children and adults were removed from families, individuals were institutionalized or incarcerated, family connections were severed, and the sense of kinship, continuity and community was lost, now therefore be it*~~

~~*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:*~~

~~*That the General Assembly sincerely apologizes and expresses its sorrow and regret to all individual Vermonters and their families and descendants who were harmed as a result of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and practices, and be it further*~~

~~*Resolved: That the General Assembly recognizes that further legislative action should be taken to address the continuing impact of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and related practices of disenfranchisement, ethnocide, and genocide.*~~

~~*Whereas, starting in the early 1900s, laws and associated policies were adopted to promote the eugenics movement, and the title of the book Breeding Better Vermonters by Nancy L. Gallagher accurately describes the movement's perpetrated intent, and*~~

~~*Whereas, this movement targeted for elimination those it deemed currently or potentially delinquent, defective, and dependent persons through sterilizations, primarily of women, to prevent individuals from having children, and*~~

~~*Whereas, in 1912, the Vermont General Assembly passed S.79, "An act to authorize and provide for the sterilization of imbeciles, feeble-minded, and insane persons, rapists, confirmed criminals and other defectives," however, Governor Allen M. Fletcher vetoed the bill, citing constitutional concerns that Attorney General Rufus E. Brown had raised, and*~~

~~*Whereas, nevertheless, State agencies and institutions adopted policies and procedures to carry out the intent of the vetoed legislation and the beliefs of the eugenics movement, and*~~

~~*Whereas, in 1925, University of Vermont zoology professor Henry F. Perkins, who established the Eugenics Survey of Vermont and served as President of the American Eugenics Society, collaborated with leaders of Vermont State government to collect evidence of Vermonters' alleged delinquency, dependency, and deficiency, and*~~

~~*Whereas, these State-sanctioned policies targeted the poor and persons with mental and physical disabilities, and*~~

~~*Whereas, these same policies also targeted individuals, families, and communities whose heritage was documented as French Canadian, French-Indian, or of other mixed ethnic or racial composition and persons whose extended families' successor generations now identify as Abenaki or as members of other indigenous bands or tribes, and*~~

~~*Whereas, in 1927, S.59, "An act relating to Voluntary Eugenical Sterilization" passed the Senate but was defeated in the House, and*~~

~~*Whereas, the General Assembly adopted 1931 Acts and Resolves No. 174 (Act 174), "An Act for Human Betterment by Voluntary Sterilization," for the purpose of eliminating from the future Vermont genetic pool persons deemed mentally unfit to procreate, and*~~

~~*Whereas, this State-sanctioned eugenics policy was not an isolated example of oppression but reflected the historic marginalization, discriminatory treatment, and displacement of these targeted groups in Vermont, and*~~

~~*Whereas, eugenics advocates promoted sterilization for the protection of Vermont's "old stock" and to preserve the physical and social environment of Vermont for their children, and*~~

Whereas, the Eugenics Survey received assistance from State and municipal officials, individuals, and private organizations, and the resulting sterilization, institutionalization, and separation policies intruded on the lives of its victims and had devastating and irreversible impacts that still persist in the lives of the targeted groups and especially the descendants of those who were directly impacted, and

Whereas, in conducting the Eugenics Survey, the surveyors were granted access to case files from State agencies and institutions, and the files were made available to persons of authority, including police departments, social workers, educators, and town officials, and

Whereas, as a result of the opening of these files, children and adults were removed from families, individuals were institutionalized or incarcerated, family connections were severed, and the sense of kinship, continuity and community was lost, and

Whereas, the legacy of the eugenics movement continues to influence some of Vermont's current policies and legislation, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly sincerely apologizes and expresses sorrow and regret to all individual Vermonters and their families and descendants who were harmed as a result of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and practices, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly continues to work to eradicate the lasting legacy of its prior actions by listening to and working with the affected individuals and communities, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly recognizes that further legislative action should be taken to address the continuing impact of State-sanctioned eugenics policies and related practices of disenfranchisement, ethnocide, and genocide.