

Date: February 24, 2021

To: House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs

From: Ed Paquin, Executive Director, Disability Rights Vermont,
for the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights

In re: J.R.H.2.

Dear Committee Members,

Vermonters pride ourselves in the wonderful and strong community that we have built over the years. We glory in the history of our 14 years as a republic and in being the 14th state. We've maintained traditions of strong local government and take pride in our citizen legislature and our ability to resolve or at least make progress on challenging issues through civil debate.

We would fool ourselves, though, to think that we are above the ugly history of discrimination and cruelty based on disability, race, national origin and economic status that has tarnished our nation and is rightfully gaining more of the attention it deserves today.

J.R.H.2 lays out the hideous action of a former General Assembly that was supported by academia and a society that was more than willing to place itself above others, even going so far as to wrest control of their reproduction, their right to raise their children, their right to live where they choose and their right to be free from unjust institutionalization and incarceration. And all to preserve the dominance of a culture that fashioned itself as able to judge the very worth of the future existence of other citizens. There should be little wonder that Vermont helped provide inspiration to the genocidal ethic of the Third Reich.

Bias today might be less explicit, but it nevertheless still exists and it is crucial that we recall and address the past because the effects of the past continue in more than just attitudes, as is acknowledged in J.R.H.2. We need only look at cases like “Ashley X” in which the dominant culture sterilized and deformed a child believing their judgement to be above any appreciation of her personhood.

VCDR Supports the passage of J.R.H.2 and appreciates that you have included a recognition that beyond apology, further legislative action is needed to address the current, real results and fallout of eugenics. The disability community supports a beginning to truth and reconciliation.

Thank you for your work to address this alarming element of our past and for your continued willingness to shape a future that is more just.