

STATE OF MAINE

—
**IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND AND THIRTEEN**
—

**JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE TRAGIC
INVOLUNTARY STERILIZATION OF MAINE'S CITIZENS WITH
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES FOR MORE THAN FIFTY
YEARS AND REDEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE MAINE
IDEALS OF TOLERANCE, INDEPENDENCE AND EQUALITY
FOR ALL PERSONS**

WHEREAS, one hundred and five years ago, in 1908, the Maine School for the Feeble-Minded, later Pineland Center, admitted its first inmates; and

WHEREAS, the school was intended to be a permanent home for certain Maine citizens who were dependent upon the public for their care, who were then called the "feeble-minded"; and

WHEREAS, at that time there was a belief that "feeble-mindedness" was a mental defect, a permanent condition that once established does not grow worse or better if left untreated; and

WHEREAS, the "high-grade imbecile" was, in the words of the school's first superintendent, Dr. George Bliss, "already tidy in his personal habits. He can be taught to read and write...he often has considerable musical ability and can be taught to do many kinds of work well"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Bliss and others further believed that "his defect shows most in his relations with his fellow men. He is always improvident, always a liar, a petty thief, perhaps cruel to animals and children, and he may be so strongly inclined to set fires that he finds the impulse impossible to resist. Because of his weak will and deficient judgement, he is likely influenced for evil, and is likely to become a drunkard, a vagrant, or if a woman, a prostitute"; and

WHEREAS, in that era, the now-disgraced eugenics movement, which advocated practices to improve the genetic composition of a population, usually human, and to reduce reproduction of less-desired people and traits, claimed poverty and intemperance were genetic traits due to "impure blood"; and

WHEREAS, in 1925, the State of Maine, by law, allowed the forced eugenic sterilization of the feeble-minded to "prevent reproduction of feeble-mindedness" and, in the words of one Maine Senator, "permanently improve the human race" and "enforce in a simple way sound, decent and efficient human beings"; and

WHEREAS, this law remained in effect until 1983 and resulted in countless involuntary sterilizations of individuals who lived at the institution and elsewhere, and we now recognize the brutality of these actions against innocent citizens; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-sixth Legislature now assembled in the First Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, take this opportunity to recognize with profound shame and regret the involuntary sterilization of Maine citizens with intellectual disabilities over a 57-year period in our history, and, while rebuking this

past, rededicate ourselves to the ideals of tolerance, independence and equality for all persons in our ever-changing world, which are the birthright and heritage of all proud Mainers, and rededicate ourselves as lawmakers to the social justice that is the right of all persons; and be it further

RESOLVED: That suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to Maine's Disability Rights Center, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, the Maine Historical Society and the Maine State Archives.