

Californian Victims of Forced Sterilization Denied Reparations



Sharon Fennix (pictured left) was forcibly sterilized while incarcerated at Valley State Prison in California's Central Valley in 2006.

A prison doctor, remarking on how she didn't need children since she was serving a life sentence, forcibly sterilized Fennix through an endometrial ablation. Fennix never provided informed consent, and was not told or made aware of the doctor's actions until her release from prison in 2017.

Despite the passage of historic legislation in 2021 that provided financial reparations to people who were forcibly or involuntarily sterilized, Fennix was denied reparations from California's Victim Compensation Board. A year-long investigation by UC Berkely's Investigative Reporting Program found that the compensation board has denied a majority of applicants and repeatedly rejected ablations as a procedure worthy of recognition.

Fennix's case, and those of other formerly incarcerated women, reflects a critical blind spot in California's efforts to compensate survivors of state-sponsored sterilization. The prison doctor, James Heinrich, ordered at least 80 ablations between 2006 and 2012, as well as tubal ligations, hysterectomies, and the removal of ovaries without the proper informed consent of patients. His reasoning: that the state wasn't paying doctors a significant amount of money for the sterilizations "compared to what you save in welfare paying for these unwanted children — as they procreated more."

Fennix has applied twice for compensation and been denied by the board each time. Continuing to push is Fennix's way of demanding that the board begin to fully comprehend the extent of the damage that was done to people like her.

Source: [KQED, "Survivors from California's Period of Forced Sterilization Denied Reparations"](#)