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State Seeking Eugenics Victims

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By Kirsten Ballard

Staff Writer



State officials are traveling to various communities to seek people who could qualify for compensation under the state's new Justic for Sterilization Victims Foundation.

"Many victims said this day would never come," said Charmaine Fuller Cooper, executive director for the N.C. Justice for Sterilization Victims Foundation. Cooper was in Moore County last week to talk about the program.

In 2010, Gov. Bev Perdue established the "N.C. Justice for Sterilization Victims Foundation," with the ultimate goal of compensation and healing for the victims of the N.C. Eugenics Program. The foundation is a clearinghouse for information and assistance for victims.

Between 1933 and 1974, an estimated 7,600 poor, uneducated, institutionalized, sick or disabled persons were sterilized by choice, force or coercion during the eugenics program in all 100 counties. There was a wide range of victims; 85 percent were women, and 60 percent white. Poverty was the only common theme.

Legislation was filed in the General Assembly earlier this month to compensate the sterilization victims and their families. If passed, the bill will give a lump sum, tax-free payment of \$50,000

to victims verified before Dec. 31, 2015. It will also provide continued funding for the N.C. Justice for Sterilization Victims Foundation. The bill will not cover mental health services.

"Compensation is so we remember and do not repeat this history," said Fuller Cooper. "It



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will serve as a deterrent. It does not right the wrong, but it admits the state was wrong.

"Once the petition for sterilization was received, it was basically a done deal," said Fuller Cooper on what she describes as the "most aggressive" eugenics program in the nation. Nationally, 33 states had Eugenic Boards, but North Carolina's ran the longest.

So far, 132 verifications statewide have been made, including 118 living victims. The foundation estimates between 1,500 to 2,000 victims are still living and unverified.

Moore County is on record for having 78 sterilizations performed, but no victims have been verified.

"A lot of people were waiting to see if this is taken seriously," said Fuller Cooper. "It's a very sensitive issue."

Many people did not know of the eugenics program. Fuller Cooper says many are met "with a sense of disbelief" that this happened in the state.

Last year the Department of Public Instruction added the eugenics program into the middle school history curriculum.

A hearing yesterday in Raleigh had time set aside for public comments from victims along with advocates. Fuller Cooper believes the Senate and House voting will be finished by the end of June.

"[It's] moving very quickly this year," said Fuller Cooper. "Now we're just really waiting to see the outcome."

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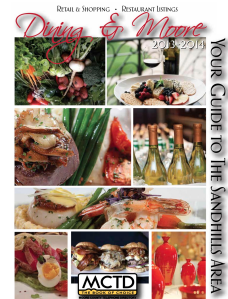
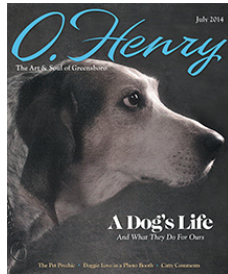
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