

Senate Resolution 247

By: Senators Shafer of the 48th, Rogers of the 21st, Johnson of the 1st, Moody of the 56th, Williams of the 19th and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Expressing profound regret for Georgia's participation in the eugenics movement in the
2 United States and marking the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization law in the United
3 States; and for other purposes.

4 WHEREAS, the so-called science of eugenics emerged in the late 19th century as an
5 outgrowth of Darwinian evolutionary theory, first advanced by anthropologist and geneticist
6 Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin; and

7 WHEREAS, in the early 20th century, this pseudo-scientific movement gained popularity
8 in the United States and advocated the improvement of the human race by the application of
9 Darwinian principles to eliminate supposed hereditary flaws such as mental disability and
10 physical deformity and to alleviate human suffering through selective breeding and birth
11 control; and

12 WHEREAS, eugenics was endorsed by so-called "progressive" academicians, scientists,
13 politicians, and newspaper editors, often over religious objections that such matters "ought
14 to be left to God"; and

15 WHEREAS, in 1907, Indiana became the first state to enact a eugenics based sterilization
16 law, mandating the sterilization of "confirmed criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles"; and

17 WHEREAS, eventually more than 30 states enacted similar compulsory sterilization laws,
18 resulting in the forced sterilization of more than 65,000 individuals in the United States; and

19 WHEREAS, the Supreme Court sanctioned the practice of compulsory sterilization in the
20 infamous 1927 decision by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in which the court upheld
21 Virginia's sterilization of a young woman in a mental health facility on the grounds that
22 "three generations of imbeciles [were] enough"; and

1 WHEREAS, with the editorial support of *The Atlanta Constitution*, the Georgia General
2 Assembly passed a eugenics law in 1935, but that law was vetoed by Governor Eugene
3 Talmadge; and

4 WHEREAS, in 1937, after Governor Talmadge had left office, Georgia enacted a new law
5 creating the State Board of Eugenics and authorizing the compulsory sterilization of
6 Georgia's patients in state mental health facilities as well as Georgia inmates in state prisons
7 and reformatories; and

8 WHEREAS, Georgia's eugenics law remained on the books until 1970; and

9 WHEREAS, more compulsory sterilizations were performed in Georgia between 1937 and
10 1970 than in any other state in the nation except North Carolina; and

11 WHEREAS, eugenics legislation devalued the sanctity of human life, placed claimed
12 scientific benefit over basic human dignity, and denied the God given rights recognized by
13 our Founding Fathers; and

14 WHEREAS, eugenics legislation targeted the most vulnerable among us, including the poor
15 and racial minorities, wrongly dehumanizing them under the color of law and for the claimed
16 purposes of public health and good; and

17 WHEREAS, in the past five years, several other states, including Virginia, Oregon, North
18 Carolina, and California, have publicly repudiated their involvement in the eugenics
19 movement; and

20 WHEREAS, the year 2007 marks the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization in the
21 United States and the 70th anniversary of the passage of Georgia's sterilization law.

22 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
23 express their profound regret for Georgia's participation in the eugenics movement and the
24 injustices done under eugenics laws, including the forced sterilization of Georgia citizens.

25 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this body hereby support the full
26 education of Georgia citizens about the eugenics movement in order to foster a respect for
27 the fundamental dignity of human life and the God given rights recognized by our Founding
28 Fathers.

- 1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
- 2 to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to the public and the media.