

NY is developing education program on harms of medically unnecessary surgery on intersex children

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The New York state Capitol is seen in Albany, N.Y., Tuesday, June 20, 2023. New York is requiring state health officials to develop an outreach program to educate parents and doctors on the harmful impacts of medically unnecessary treatments performed on infants born with physical traits that don't fit typical definitions for male or female categories. Credit: AP Photo/Hans Pennink, File

New York is requiring state health officials to develop an outreach program to educate parents and doctors about the harmful impacts of medically unnecessary treatments performed on young children born intersex.

The measure, which was signed into law on Wednesday by Governor Kathy Hochul, aims to bring awareness to people born with genitalia, chromosomes or reproductive organs that don't fit typical definitions of male or female. New York City Council implemented a similar measure in 2021.

Advocates for the statewide legislation say the medically unnecessary operations on infants and young children born intersex come with a slew of potential negative impacts that parents and doctors must be aware of.

"This education will be key to helping parents understand that surgery is permanent and can cause irreversible physical and psychological effects," State Assemblymember Rebecca Seawright said in a statement.

Various health and human rights organizations, including the Physicians for Human Rights, a U.S.-based nonprofit that advocates against human rights violations around the world, in the past have called for an end to the medical treatments.

In a 2017 memo, Physicians for Human Rights referred to the surgeries carried out on newborns who are intersex as "cruel" and "inhuman," saying they could result in sterilization and decreased sexual function. The surgeries should only be carried out when a child is old enough to make decisions about their body, they said.

A majority of advocacy groups estimate that there are about 5.6 million people in the United States who were born intersex, according to The Associated Press. That estimate is based on a [review](#) published in the

American Journal of Human Biology that looked at four decades of medical literature from 1955 to 1998.

An advisory council that would help develop the public outreach program in New York must include intersex people and health care professionals who have medical expertise in treating patients who are intersex, according to the legislation.

In California, a majority of state lawmakers rejected a bill in 2020 that would have banned some medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children until they are old enough to participate in the decision.

Correction note: This story was first published on Nov. 9, 2023. It was updated to correct the day the legislation was signed. It was signed on Wednesday, not Tuesday.

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