

Alabama governor signs chemical castration bill into law

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Alabama Republican Governor Kay Ivey signed into law a bill on Tuesday that requires certain convicted sex offenders to undergo chemical castration as a condition of their parole. Alabama HB 379 goes into effect September 1.

Sex offenders over the age of 21 who are convicted of sexually abusing children under the age of 13 will be required to undergo chemical castration beginning one month before release on parole from prison. They will not be allowed to halt the chemical treatment until a judge deems it unnecessary. The individuals who are subjected to chemical castration will be forced to pay for the procedure themselves.

The bill was sponsored by Republican Representative Stephen Hurst, who voted for Alabama's near-total abortion ban signed into law by Governor Ivey on May 15. It is the latest measure passed by the state legislature that mandates harsh penalties for those convicted of a crime.

Ivey declared the bill "a step toward protecting children in Alabama." This is in a state with the highest infant mortality rate and one of the highest child poverty rates (26.5 percent) in the US.

Additionally, the mandate, ostensibly to protect children from rape and assault, comes less than one month after the abortion ban, which prohibits abortion in the vast majority of sexual assault and incest cases.

Chemical castration is a non-surgical procedure that involves the administration of anaphrodisiac drugs such as cyproterone acetate and medroxyprogesterone acetate, used to blunt the libido. Despite the conclusions of smaller, limited studies carried out in the UK and South Korea, there is little evidence to support the claim that chemical castration is an effective means of preventing sexual assault.

Many scientific criticisms of chemical castration

reference the point that mating behavior still occurs in mammals that are castrated to prevent population growth, such as domesticated cats and dogs. Critics of the procedure in the criminal justice system argue that the causes of sexual assault are not related to sexual desire, but are bound up with more complex social processes.

In reality, sexual assault cannot be prevented by medications, but only through a radical transformation of the very social order of class exploitation that fosters it.

The serious health risks of chemical castration are widely known. These include osteoporosis (the loss of bone density), increased long-term risk of cardiovascular disease and enlargement of the mammary glands in males. Although libido is usually restored after treatment stops, the other side effects can last long after, and in some cases can be fatal.

Rep. Hurst responded to criticisms of the bill when it was proposed to the House for a vote, saying, "I am not for hurting anyone, but if they hurt a child they need to be marked for life." Hurst's words echo those of adherents of the Democratic Party-led #MeToo movement who call for harsh penalties for those accused of sexual assault and harassment.

In the US, California was the first state to mandate chemical castration as a condition of parole for offenders convicted of repeated sexual assaults against children. Iowa, Florida and Louisiana have laws under which convicted offenders can be sentenced to chemical castration in all cases involving serious sex offenses. Georgia, Montana, Oregon, Texas and Wisconsin have also experimented with the procedure. Michigan's Court of Appeals ruled chemical castration unlawful in 1984 due to questions surrounding the safety of the drug used and the problem of informed

consent.

Globally, Indonesia, South Korea and Russia have allowed courts to prescribe chemical castration as part of the sentencing of sexual offenders. In India and Macedonia, a legal framework for such measures is under review.

There is a long and dishonorable history of such punishments, which degrade human beings and deprive them of their fundamental right to privacy and control over their own bodies. In the UK, where homosexuality was outlawed and considered a mental illness throughout most of the 20th century, chemical castration was used as punishment of those who admitted to having homosexual relations.

Alan Turing, the brilliant British mathematician, code-breaker and “father of computer science,” was sentenced to chemical castration by administration of synthetic estrogen when he was found to have a gay lover in 1952. Turing said of the procedure, “No doubt I shall emerge from it all a different man, but quite who I’ve not found out.” He committed suicide two years later in 1954, when he was 41 years old.

HB 379 lays the groundwork in Alabama for cruel and unusual punishment in the form of human experimentation carried out against inmates. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Alabama considers chemical castration to be a serious civil rights violation, regardless of the gravity of the crime committed. There are also ethical concerns about informed consent of the inmates receiving the procedure, since according to the law the state makes this decision for them.

Dillon Nettles, policy analyst for the ACLU of Alabama, told *Rolling Stone* magazine, “This all seems to be part of an ongoing effort to violate the Constitution,” noting that chemical castration fits the definition of “cruel and unusual” punishment, which is banned by the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution.



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