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## NEWS RELEASE

May 3, 2005

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# SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION CALLS FOR END TO MEDICALLY UNNECESSARY SURGERY ON INTERSEX CHILDREN

## Improper Use of Medical Interventions Seen As Human Rights Abuse

The San Francisco Human Rights Commission today announced the release of its report *A Human Rights Investigation Into The Medical "Normalization" Of Intersex People*. The report is the result of a two-year project that investigated concerns expressed by intersex people. The Commission held a public hearing on May 27, 2004 to hear testimony on the issue of "normalizing" medical interventions being performed on intersex infants and children.

"Intersex" is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. People with intersex anatomies asked the Commission to explore the question of unwanted, "normalizing" interventions performed on intersex children.

"Normalizing" interventions are medically unnecessary genital surgeries and hormone treatments performed on intersex infants and children solely to assign a sex or gender. These procedures also are used to alter genitalia and other physical characteristics so that they conform with social standards for male and female bodies. These interventions are not performed for the treatment of physical illness or to alleviate pain. Instead, these surgeries are irreversible, often causing disruption of bodily functions, pain, and the need for additional surgeries.



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## **SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION CALLS FOR END TO MEDICALLY UNNECESSARY SURGERY ON INTERSEX CHILDREN**

The historic hearing was the first time that a governmental entity in the US had ever addressed the topic of intersex from a human rights perspective. Commission Chair Malcolm Heinicke said, “We hope that this report will foster a better understanding of the issues facing intersex people and their families. Families should be given the opportunity to make decisions regarding medical procedures with complete information, and not in unnecessary and limiting haste.”

Specifically, the Commission became concerned that homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism were strong social forces that contributed to the decision-making process for assigning sex and gender to intersex children through “normalizing” genital surgeries and sex hormone treatments. The report is a summary and compilation of materials, testimony, and information submitted by people with intersex anatomies, parents of children and adults with intersex anatomies, medical providers, academics, legal experts, advocacy groups, representatives of City agencies and departments, and the public. The Commission’s Executive Director Virginia Harmon said “We are grateful to intersex people for bringing these concerns to the Commission’s attention, and for providing the Commission an opportunity to facilitate a dialog between intersex people, their families, and medical providers.”

After diligent review of the testimony and medical and academic research materials submitted, the Commission found that “normalizing” interventions are medically unnecessary, are not medical or social emergencies, and that such interventions performed without the patient’s informed consent are inherently human rights abuses. The Commission has recommended that “normalizing” interventions never be performed in infancy or childhood, and that any procedures that are not medically necessary only take place when the patient gives legal consent. The Commission further has recommended that a patient-centered treatment model be implemented, emphasizing peer support, access to information, openness, treating the child as the patient, and honoring a person’s right to make informed choices about their own body.

Copies of the report are available online at [www.sfhrc.org](http://www.sfhrc.org). VHS Tapes or DVDs of the May 27, 2004 Intersex Public Hearing are available online at <http://sunset.ci.sf.ca.us/sfgtv.nsf>.

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