



## Thomas F. Coleman

*People with Disabilities Have Been  
Part of His Advocacy for Decades*

Thomas F. Coleman has been advocating for the rights of people with disabilities since he met Dr. Nora J. Baladerian in 1980. That was the year when Coleman became the Executive Director of the Governor's Commission on Personal Privacy.

Coleman wanted the Commission to focus on the privacy rights of a wide array of constituencies, one of which was people with disabilities. On his recommendation, Dr. Baladerian became a Commissioner and Chaired its Committee on Disability.

The Commission's Report, issued in 1982, contained recommendations to clarify and strengthen the rights of people with disabilities. One of its proposals was that "disability" be added to California's hate crime laws. That happened in 1984.

Coleman's next project involving disability issues was his work as a Commissioner on the Attorney General's Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious, and Minority Violence. In addition to focusing on violence motivated by racial prejudice and homophobia, the Commission's work – spanning several years from 1983 to 1989 – also included violence against people with disabilities.

The next phase of Coleman's work with disability issues involved family diversity. Coleman was the principal consultant to the Los Angeles City Task Force on Family Diversity. He directed this 38-member Task Force from 1986 to 1988. He wrote its final report, which included a major chapter on Families with Members Who Have Disabilities. Recommendations were made on how the city could improve the quality of life for all families, including people with disabilities.

A few years later, he and Dr. Baladerian created a Disability, Abuse, and Personal Rights Project, which was organized under the auspices of their nonprofit organization, Spectrum Institute.

Coleman's advocacy shifted to other issues for several years, focusing on widely divergent sub-

jects such as promoting the rights of single people, to fighting the abuse of troubled teenagers by boot camps and boarding schools.

Several years ago, Coleman began working again with Dr. Baladerian, devoting more of his time to the disability and abuse issues which she has championed for decades. As he learned more about these issues, he dedicated more of his time and talent to abuse of people with disabilities.

A few years ago, Coleman and Dr. Baladerian instituted a new Disability and Abuse Project, which recently conducted the largest national survey ever done on abuse and disability.

Although most of the work of the Project involves research and advocacy on policy, Coleman has become involved in several individual cases. One challenged a plea bargain as too lenient to serve justice for the sexual assault victims. Another sought to reduce the 100 year sentence of an 18 year old man with a developmental disability as disproportionately harsh. The other three involved adults whose rights were not being protected by the conservatorship system.

The most recent campaign is the Disability and Guardianship Project, which seeks to better protect the rights of adults with developmental disabilities involved in the guardianship process.

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