



# Thomas F. Coleman

*People with Disabilities Have Been Part of His Research, Education, and Advocacy for Decades*

Thomas F. Coleman has been advocating for the rights of people with disabilities since 1980. That was the year he became the Executive Director of the Governor's Commission on Personal Privacy in California. Coleman wanted the commission to focus on the privacy rights of a wide array of constituencies, including people with disabilities. At his suggestion, the commission created a 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, religious animus, 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 those who had members with disabilities.

Coleman's advocacy shifted to other issues for the next dozen or so years, focusing on widely divergent subjects such as promoting the civil rights of single people to fighting the abuse of troubled teenagers by boot camps and boarding schools.

In 2007, Coleman and a colleague instituted a Disability and Abuse Project, which in 2012 conducted the largest national survey on abuse and disability. In 2013, Coleman was the primary author of a report on the findings and recommendations arising out of that survey. The report is titled: [Abuse of People with Disabilities: Victims and Their Families Speak Out.](#)

Coleman has also developed a comprehensive bibliography on [books](#) and [articles](#) on mental health therapies for people with developmental disabilities. He has published several [articles](#) on disability and child maltreatment, prevalence of abuse of people with disabilities, and the need for trauma-informed justice in guardianship and conservatorship proceedings.

In 2013, Coleman created a [Disability and Guardianship Project](#) under the auspices of Spectrum Institute, a nonprofit organization promoting guardianship and conservatorship reform, disability rights, and improved access to [mental health services](#) for adults with developmental disabilities. He is the author of a statement of [legal principles](#) underlying the right to such services. The principles have been [endorsed](#) by a wide range of advocacy organizations.

In 2016, Coleman and filmmaker Greg Byers produced a documentary film titled [Pursuit of Justice](#). It tracks the efforts of Coleman and a team of advocates as they were promoting guardianship and conservatorship reform in California and throughout the nation.

Coleman has written many [policy reports and commentaries](#) on disability rights, supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship, and targeted [systemic reforms](#) to conservatorship and guardianship systems. He has also made [presentations](#) on these issues at state, national, and international conferences.

Coleman has been practicing law since 1973.

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<https://spectruminstitute.org>

<https://tomcoleman.us/>

**Email:**

[tomcoleman@spectruminstitute.org](mailto:tomcoleman@spectruminstitute.org)