

ERA Testimony for the Equal Rights Amendment

State and Local Government Finance and Policy

ERAMN H.F. 173

Dear Madam Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity and the honor to give testimony on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and thank you for holding a hearing on this important matter in March, Women's History Month. My name is Kathryn Ringham and in my retirement years as a gerontological social worker, I have been working on becoming a good ancestor by advocating for issues that will leave our country better than we found it for our children, our grandchildren and all future generations. I believe the ERA will do just that. It is long overdue.

ERAMN along with our many partners and allies have a basic, straightforward and quite simple request of our legislators: to enshrine the guarantee of sex/gender equality into our state constitution. Our aim is to have the legislature approve the state ERA ballot initiative in 2023 to be added to the General Election voter ballot in 2024. This will allow the people of MN to vote on equality for all. As Alice Paul, the writer of the original ERA said, "There is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

Unfortunately, the journey for women/gender equality has not been quick nor smooth. Indeed, it has been 236 years since women were omitted from the text of the Constitution by our founding fathers, 103 years since the final success of the 19th Amendment and **100 years since the ERA was first introduced in Congress**. The ERA was intended to be a quick follow-up to the 19th Amendment to officially codify Women's rights in the law. The centennial year of delay adds symbolic weight and signifies "time's up" to pass the ERA bill in MN.

There are many reasons why the ERA would empower and improve the lives of women at this time of increasing vulnerability. Here are three critical benefits:

1. **Women deserve constitutional insurance:** Having the ERA words explicitly stated in the constitution would guarantee equal legal rights and permanent protection for Minnesotans regardless of sex/gender. It would mean that the equal rights of women will not be subject to the whims of divisive politics. Laws can be revoked more easily than amendments. That's why we need the ERA in our U.S. Constitution.
2. **The ERA would correct a glaring historical omission:** The ERA will require the State Supreme Court to use the higher standard of "strict scrutiny" in sex discrimination cases similar to the standard used in race, religion and country of origin decisions. Currently, women, in the eyes of the law, are considered of "intermediate" legal status, making claims of sex discrimination vulnerable to interpretation and inconsistent precedents. That's why we need a robust ERA in our U.S. Constitution.

3. **None of us is equal unless we are all equal:** The ERA is essential to economic well-being of over half the population. It will remove barriers that thwart women's advancement, making clear that the right to be free from violence, the right to pursue economic opportunities equally, and the right to realize our full potential are not subject to negotiation. We need to acknowledge that our piecemeal approach to gender fairness laws hasn't corrected the problems we face. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women still make 83 cents for every dollar men make doing the same job with much greater inequities for women of color. For example, Black women were paid 64 cents and Hispanic women 57 cents. That's why we need justice and fairness the ERA brings in our U.S. Constitution.

Women in the US have waited long enough for the Equal Rights Amendment and you have the power to help realize this goal.

- *It is time* to acknowledge that polling results stating that support for the amendment is bipartisan and popular.
- *It is time* for MN to join 27 other states who already have the ERA.
- *It is time* for the critical tools to enforce women's equality and fight discrimination that the passage of the ERA will bring.
- *It is time* to align Minnesota on the right side of history embracing equality for all. Minnesota is overdue to pass the transformative, symbolic and foundational amendment—the ERA.

The absence of the Equal Rights Amendment is a stain on our Constitution and our state. It is time to put the vote before the people to amend the constitution to enlarge our basic commitments to equality. Supporting constitutional amendments is the best way to assure that rights are not taken away by courts or politicians in the future. As I continue my work on being a good ancestor, I agree with Ruth Bader Ginsburg when she said, "I would like my granddaughters, when they pick up the Constitution, to see that notion – that women and men are persons of equal stature – I'd like them to see that is a basic principle of our society."

Thanks for your time and attention,

Kathryn Ringham, ERAMN Working Board Member