

April 21, 2023

Dear Judiciary Chair Representative Matt Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing in strong support of LD 1412, the Maine Equal Rights Amendment. It is just amazing to me we don't have a federal one already! I thought that democracy would win out and the original federal ERA would certainly be part of our Constitution by now. A majority of Americans want it and so do a majority of Mainers, reportedly. So why is our democracy dragging its feet when it comes to women's rights?

At the moment the Maine ERA seems to be held hostage by those who want to block women's rights to an abortion—but this is about so much more than abortion. It is about being paid equally, about similar numbers of women being promoted as men, about getting equal consideration, and about protection. And basic respect.

In my career during the 1980s and 1990s I worked for a federal agency as a scientist and it wasn't until many years later that I realized that I was not mentored like my male counterparts, either in college or during my career. I missed out on all sorts of opportunities without even knowing about it. If there had been an equal rights amendment, I think that statistics would have required actions to be taken to make sure women would advance and take leadership roles in similar numbers to men. Several women I knew suffered sexual harassment from their bosses. I never thought that we'd still be fighting these same battles in 2023, but just a few years ago I read about some of the same sorts of stories of harassment, especially during field work, going on in another federal science agency—I was stunned and disappointed that the same issues were still going on!

What women have now is a patchwork of laws protecting them in some ways, and these laws can be changed at any time—that is just not acceptable! Everyone deserves equal protection under the law—what kind of a society is this that can't see their way to making everyone equal under the constitution?

The Bangor Daily News has thrown a light on sexual harassment and discrimination against women in Maine over the past few years at the Maine General Medical Center and in the Maine National Guard, showing that harassment and discrimination are ongoing problems here in Maine, not something that our society has gotten past as some assume, and I suspect there is much more of it going on than has been reported. Women suffering harassment and discrimination deserve better. They deserve not to have their careers undermined, and they deserve to be rewarded in their jobs based on their merits and hard work.

I believe that an ERA would also help protect women who suffer domestic abuse. Even now, some local jurisdictions seem to believe that domestic abuse is people's private business instead of a criminal act, with local jurisdictions sometimes failing to enforce state or local protection orders. How can we allow these antiquated and dangerous views to continue?

I urge you to vote for LD 1412, an amendment to the Maine constitution, in order to give the people of Maine the chance to vote on it themselves, the truly democratic way to handle this issue. I hope we can bring Maine out of the dark ages into a future with equal rights for all. Think about your own friends and relatives who could be discriminated against, and how you would like them to thrive!

Leda Beth Gray, Blue Hill, Maine.

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LD 1412

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