

In Support of LD1412

Senator Carney, Representative Moonan and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Kimberly Simmons, from Portland Maine. I am an educator, mother and have worked on social justice and civic engagement projects for much of my adult life.

I am excited about a State ERA for many reasons, but today want to emphasize the value of engaging in a public conversation and vote about the ERA

This bill provides an extraordinary and exciting opportunity to open up a civic conversation about our shared values, and the value of equal protection under the law, in particular. Passing LD1412 will send it to the voters – you are not deciding the merits of this amendment, but the merits of a Statewide discussion about civil rights and Constitutional guarantees. I strongly believe that conversation is critical for us, right now, and hope that you agree.

To the question of scope — a constitutional amendment is not a statute. It does not define specific and technical laws, but ensures that those laws are grounded in and reflect our core principals - in this case the principal of equal protection under the law and that we have a remedy if the State violates our rights in the laws it passes. It is up to us - the people - to demand we maintain our constitutional protections and how that happens can take a variety of pathways. Understanding how our rights are and are not equally protected now will give us new tools for the future. Our collective understanding will grow as we engage in a public conversation through a referendum campaign.

[Trust in Government](#) and in each other is [low](#), however a yearning for more trust and a belief that trust is critical to our shared future is high. In a 2021 PEW research study, more than 85% of US respondents agreed that we need major reforms to our political system. On the radio this morning, NPR reported that [trust in the Supreme Court](#) is at an all-time low. A referendum on the ERA invites all of us into conversations about civil rights, democracy, and the political value of equal representation under the law and through conversation we will rebuild trust in our public process.

In this historical moment, we need to revitalize civic education and civic conversations. I have taught sociology and women and gender studies courses for decades. Very few students can name the protections in the Federal Bill of Rights. Fewer know about the Declaration of Human Rights or the difference between civil and human rights.

[National studies](#) find that most adults know very little about what the Constitution actually says, or how Government works, which is a threat to the overall project of Democracy. We will not be able to protect that which we can't name or imagine. We won't work toward a common good if we feel alienated and excluded from [the commons](#) themselves. Passing LD1412 to the voters is an act of civic inclusion needed to strengthen our capacity for public conversation, civic engagement, and Democratic practice. I urge you to invest in Maine voters and vote for this bill.