

Anne Gass
Gray, ME
March 4, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary.

My name is Anne Gass and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of LD 260. I serve as the Chair of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women although I'm not speaking on their behalf today. But I'm also an independent historian and a women's rights history activist, so I have a deep understanding of women's long fight for equality.

I come by this fight honestly. Back in 1915 my suffragist great-grandmother, Florence Brooks Whitehouse, appeared before this very committee to demand voting rights for women. I'm incredulous that 110 years later we are still debating whether women should have full equality with men under our state Constitution.

Previous versions of Maine's ERA sought solely to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex. However, we know that prohibiting discrimination based on sex doesn't go far enough. Because there are a lot of ways to discriminate; based on skin color, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, gender orientation, all kinds of reasons.

We've seen that in Maine throughout our history. Europeans stole land from Native peoples and suppressed their culture; neighborhoods were redlined so that Irish Catholics, Blacks and Jews were segregated in their own communities. All endured discrimination in employment and education, among other things.

It's not just that such discrimination inflicts emotional and psychological trauma, although that should be enough to make us stop and think. But the long-term economic consequences from that legal discrimination are well documented. Those who benefited from discrimination amassed social, political, and financial assets that provided their descendants an advantage compared to those who were left out. Inequalities became locked in and very difficult to overcome.

Constitutional equality is good for families. It's good for communities. It's good for Maine. Mainers overwhelmingly support it. Please vote "Ought to Pass" for LD 260.

Thank you.