

Sen. Carney, Representative Moonen, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Anne Gass and I'm here in support of LD 1412. I'm an independent historian who has written two books on women's fight for voting rights. I also serve as an appointed member of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, and as Maine Coordinator for the National Votes for Women Trail, although I'm not speaking on their behalf today. I come to this discussion of LD 1412 with an understanding of history and its connections to the present.

This year, 2023, marks the centennial of the original ERA bill being introduced in Congress. We are also coming up on 250 years of America's independence. Let's ponder that for a moment. In all this time, women have struggled to achieve equality with men. And although we have made great strides we're still not there yet.

As with the federal ERA, the previous versions of Maine's ERA bills have sought to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex. I've supported that language in the past.

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, gender orientation, all kinds of reasons.

We've seen that in Maine throughout our history. Land was stolen from Native peoples and their culture suppressed; French-Canadians were punished for speaking their native language; neighborhoods were redlined so that Irish Catholics and Blacks and Jews were segregated in their own communities. All endured employment discrimination. And on and on.

In recent years we've begun to come to terms with the long-term negative effects of legal discrimination. It's not just that such discrimination inflicts emotional and psychological trauma, although that should be enough to make us stop and think. But there are long term economic consequences from not being able to buy a house in a certain town (or at all), of being denied access to public programs that could have helped you and your family thrive, of being barred from colleges and universities. The social, political, and financial assets ancestors amass give the

future generations a head start compared to those who were prevented from doing so by our Constitution and our laws. This is bad for families and bad for our economy.

Alice Paul, the suffrage leader who co-authored the original ERA in 1923 and spent the rest of her life trying to get it through Congress and ratified, once said “I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality.”

The question for the Judiciary Committee and the Maine legislature isn’t “Why should we pass 1412?” but “Why wouldn’t we?”

There’s nothing complicated about ordinary equality. It’s good for families. It’s good for Maine. Please approve LD 1412.