



Written Testimony of Claudia Nachege and Pooja Dharmendran, Maryland Gender Justice Advocates  
On behalf of the Young Feminist Party

Submitted for the Record to the Judicial Proceedings Committee for the Hearing on

“SJ0001: Affirming the Federal Equal Rights Amendment”

February 21st, 2023

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Young Feminist Party and young women and queer people across Maryland who demand our inclusion in the U.S. Constitution. We are grateful for this crucial hearing on Senate Joint Resolution 1 (SJ0001), Senator Kelly’s resolution to affirm the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as the 28th Amendment and urge federal action to put young women and LGBTQ+ Marylanders in the U.S. Constitution.

The Young Feminist Party is a movement of over 13,000 young people organizing for the publication of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and advancement of gender justice in the United States. Eight hundred of these young people, including ourselves, hail from Maryland. Maryland has always been at the forefront of the movement for the ERA. In 1972, our home state was one of the first states to ratify the ERA. In 2024, Maryland Senator Ben Cardin has spearheaded efforts in Congress to remove the arbitrary deadline on the ERA and affirm the ERA as the 28th Amendment. Now, Maryland has another opportunity to be a leader on gender justice by passing SJ0001.

The ERA has met all the requirements for publication in the U.S. Constitution—passage by 2/3rds of Congress and ratification by 3/4ths of states. The states, led by Maryland, have given a clear constitutional mandate to our federal government to enshrine sex equality in our nation’s most foundational document. It is now President Biden’s constitutional and moral duty to immediately certify and publish the ERA. However, he is allowing an arbitrary, unconstitutional deadline to neglect this duty, intentionally leaving women and LGBTQ+ people out of the Constitution. Young Marylanders call on our state legislature to pass SJ0001 and put the pressure on President Biden to put us in the Constitution.

Young people across our state are taking the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment to the streets, to our schools, to the legislatures, and to the courts. Just this past Monday we were rallying on Lawyers Mall to show our support for this resolution. We know that our freedoms, bodies, and futures are on the line. We have the most to gain from constitutional gender equality, and the most to lose from inaction. Every young Marylander joined our movement for a reason. We understand the ERA will change our life for the better. We’ve shared these stories with many of your offices through constituent meetings and demonstrations. We would like to highlight a few of our shared stories to show the necessity of the Equal Rights Amendment to young people and why you must vote yes on SJ0001.

# **YOUNG FEMINIST PARTY**

**We are students at educational institutions with pervasive sex discrimination.** We are students at schools that protect sexual abusers over our safety. We are survivors who have been failed by weak Title IX protections and forced to leave our schools. If Congress recognized the ERA as the 28th amendment of the United States Constitution, survivors of sexual assault and harrasment would have a legal tool to combat sexual violence and strengthen Title IX. **We are also students who have missed class because of our periods and sexist dress codes.** An astounding [84% of high school students](#) have reported missing school at least once because they didn't have access to menstrual products. Nearly 1 in 7 undergraduate women [report](#) being unable to afford the menstrual products they needed at some point in the past-year. Black and Latine menstruators are more likely to be unable to afford menstrual products. Further, a [National Women's Law Center](#) report found dress codes to harm female students academic performance, particularly Black students. **The ERA will promote gender equality in education and fight inequities that keep young women and queer people, particularly students of color, from succeeding in school.**

**We are young people who must have control over our reproductive healthcare to stay in school and pursue our dreams.** Many young people do not have the resources to bring a child into this world—but in the 24 states that have fully or partially banned abortion since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, we are forced to make decisions about our reproductive healthcare that are against our best interest. Unintended parenthood poses a barrier to receiving a college degree and employment. Further Title X, which exists to provide low-income people with accessible birth control and reproductive care, is under attack. Just this December, a federal judge ruled in *Deanda v. Becerra* that a parent's right to control their children supersedes a child's right to bodily autonomy. The same judge vacated FDA approval of mifepristone, a pill that is necessary to safely perform a medication abortion. Although the Supreme Court temporarily halted enforcement of the decision, it has agreed to hear the case on its merits, marking the first time it will consider an abortion-related case since *Dobbs*. A national injunction on mifepristone would disproportionately harm young people of color living in communities where abortion is heavily restricted. The ERA is the solution. State-level ERAs in Utah and Minnesota blocked trigger abortion bans that went into effect last year, and a recent decision out of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court relied in part on the state's ERA to remove a ban on funding for abortions Likewise, legal scholars posit that adding the ERA to the Constitution would prompt a reevaluation of *Dobbs*. **We must recognize the ERA as the 28th amendment to the United States Constitution to defend the bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom of America's youth.**

**We are queer youth whose identities and right to exist are under attack.** Gen-Z is disproportionately queer, with [1/3 members of Gen-Z](#) identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. NPR reports that in the first four months of 2022, [over 200 homophobic laws were introduced](#) in state legislatures. These bills restricted access to life saving gender affirming healthcare, outlawed education about the LGBTQ+ community, and banned trans students from competing in sporting competitions. Homophobia and transphobia kills. In 2023, [32 trans individuals were murdered](#) in America. From a youth standpoint, in 2023, LGBTQ+ teens were also [twice as likely to attempt suicide](#). **We must recognize the ERA as the 28th amendment to the United States Constitution because the ERA will protect queer youth and let us know that we are seen, respected, and validated in our experiences.**

# **YOUNG FEMINIST PARTY**

Ultimately, the ERA is the *only* comprehensive response to today's attacks on young women and queer people. On behalf of young people across the country, we thank you for your commitment to advancing the ERA. We look forward to working together to enshrine gender equality in our Constitution.

Young Feminist Party - <https://youngfeministparty.org/>