



POSITION: Favorable SJ0001 “Affirming the Federal Equal Rights Amendment”

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

DATE: February 20, 2024

FROM: Kathi Santora, President, Maryland Women’s Heritage Center
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As President of the Maryland Women’s Heritage Center’s (MWHC) Board of Directors, I am pleased to share with you that MWHC and our volunteers recognize, document, and celebrate the contributions of Maryland women, past and present, to our state. We add “HERstory to history to tell OURstory.” MWHC is a nonpartisan organization that believes that equality should be the principle on which everyone agrees.

Recently, the MWHC Board of Directors joined with more than 35 other women’s organizations to co-sign a letter to Maryland State Legislators that urged them to introduce and adopt a resolution in the 2024 General Assembly that clearly affirms the Legislature’s view that the federal Equal Rights Amendment is valid and should finally be published as a part of the United States Constitution. We are grateful to Senator Ariana Kelly that she was quick to enthusiastically answer the call and filed SJ0001, a Senate joint resolution Affirming the Federal Equal Rights Amendment.

This resolution will not be the first time Maryland has passed a joint resolution in support of the Equal Rights Amendment. With research completed by several of the Maryland Women’s Heritage Center Board members, we learned that over 60 years ago, Maryland was the fourth state in the country to pass a bill urging Congress to adopt the ERA as a constitutional amendment.

The 1961 General Assembly, House Joint Resolution 14, passed by both the House and the Senate and signed by Governor Tawes in May 1961, stated:

“Be it resolved by the General Assembly of Maryland, That the Congress of the United States is requested to adopt and to submit to the several states, an Equal Rights for Women Amendment in order that it may speedily be added as an integral part of the Constitution of the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of State of Maryland be requested to send copies of this Resolution, under the Great Seal of the State of Maryland, to the President of the United States, the Secretary of the Senate of the United States, the Clerk of the House of Representatives [sic] of the United States, and to each member of the Maryland delegation in the Congress of the United States. Approved May 3, 1961.” (AGLC 4th ed., Maryland - General Assembly, pg. 1715).

When signing that bill, Governor Tawes gave the gold pen he used to the woman whom he credited with getting that bill passed, Harford County resident and suffragist Elizabeth Chew Forbes, as a “token of her 40 years fighting for women’s rights.”

Clearly, the movement to urge passage of the Equal Rights Amendment has stretched over many decades. Today, we hope that this recent effort will result in a long-awaited universal affirmation of the Equal Rights Amendment as part of the Constitution and recognition of equal rights as a tenet of American society.

In our view, this request to the Maryland legislature to urge the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was the right thing to do in 1961 but became a forgotten part of Maryland women’s history. Today, we urge you, the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, to take up this cause again and vote favorably on SJ0001. We invite you to become a memorable part of Maryland history by advancing this resolution.

The Equal Rights Amendment benefits all Maryland residents by creating a precedent that ensures equality for all.

Thank you in advance for your favorable vote.