

TESTIMONY

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly

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Testimony in support of SJ01/HJ01 Affirming the Federal Equal Rights Amendment.

Lesley Frost,
Co Chair National Council of Jewish Women,
Maryland State Policy Advocacy Network.
ncjw.mdacts@gmail.com

My name is Lesley Frost, and I am a resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, and a volunteer with National Council of Jewish Women, or NCJW.

NCJW is the oldest Jewish feminist civil rights organization working for equity and justice for women, children, and families in the United States and Israel. My testimony today is as the representative of all NCJW Advocates in Maryland and in support of SJ01/HJ01 Affirming the Federal Equal Rights Amendment.

A core priority of NCJW is to “Ensure and Advance Individual and Civil Rights.” To do this we advocate for policies that promote equal rights, end discrimination, and encourage opportunities for individuals of all backgrounds. From the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act, NCJW has been and continues to be on the front lines helping to enact landmark civil rights legislation.

Since the Supreme Court issued a more rigid interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, asserting that Fourteenth Amendment protections do not apply to sex discrimination, contraception or same sex marriage, protections from discrimination for women and LGBTQ+ individuals have been substantially weakened.

Without the ERA in the US Constitution, federal laws could, in future, jeopardize or eliminate rights that are guaranteed to Marylanders by our state-level Equal Rights Amendment, including equal pay, contraception, abortion care, gender-affirming care, same- sex marriage and intimacy. It is to protect the residents of this state from losing any of those rights that NCJW urges this committee to support SJ01.

It has been 100 years since the Federal Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced, and 42 years since Maryland ratified it. NCJW believes that it is time to set a constitutionally clear expectation of sex equality in all aspects of life, and make gender equality a fundamental and irrevocable tenet of society.

Consequently we are asking this committee and the 2024 Maryland General Assembly to support SJ1 and HJ1 and clearly affirm that the federal Equal Rights Amendment is the 28th Amendment to the United States Constitution.