

**MN ERA HF 501**  
**LETTER TESTIMONY**  
**House State Government Finance & Policy Committee**  
**DATE**

Dear Chair Klevorn and members of the State Government Finance & Policy Committee,

YWCA Minneapolis stands for a fully inclusive community in which each person is healthy and valued, and where racial justice, gender equality and human dignity are promoted and sustained through bold and effective women's leadership.

We write in support of the Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment, HF 501.

We urge this committee — and this legislature — to empower Minnesotans to enshrine in our state constitution the most inclusive possible Equal Rights Amendment.

Our country is facing some of the most significant attacks on bodily autonomy and self-determination we have ever seen. Young people are facing a growing mental health crisis, with BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth disproportionately affected. Persistent racial and gender biases in STEM have hindered the full potential of diverse young women and girls to drive innovation and change. Additionally, Minnesota continues to have one of the largest academic opportunity gaps in the country, limiting access to education and economic mobility for many.

The Minnesota ERA is a crucial step in addressing these disparities, ensuring protections that promote fairness, equity and opportunity for all.

The Minnesota ERA would offer everyone the strongest possible protections against discrimination based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, or sex — including pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation — no matter who is in power in state government.

At YWCA Minneapolis, we recognize that achieving racial justice and gender equity requires protections that explicitly safeguard the rights of women, BIPOC individuals, LGBTQ+ communities and all those impacted by systemic discrimination. The Minnesota ERA would help ensure that these protections are not left to shifting political landscapes but are instead upheld in our state constitution as a lasting commitment to equity and inclusion.

This ERA has widespread support from individuals across Minnesota, and the backing of labor, health, legal, reproductive justice, LGBTQ+, and philanthropic organizations.

There are few clearer reflections of our values as Minnesotans than our state Constitution, and it is the civic right and responsibility of the people of our state to amend it as needed to ensure that it reflects our values as fully and clearly as possible.

The ERA that stands before you would do exactly this. I urge this committee to empower the people of this state to enshrine our commitment to freedom, fairness, and equal rights in our constitution – once and for all. After years of dedicated efforts to secure equal rights, it's time to trust Minnesotans and give them a say in the fight for equality.

Thank you.

Shelley Carthen Watson, President & CEO, YWCA Minneapolis