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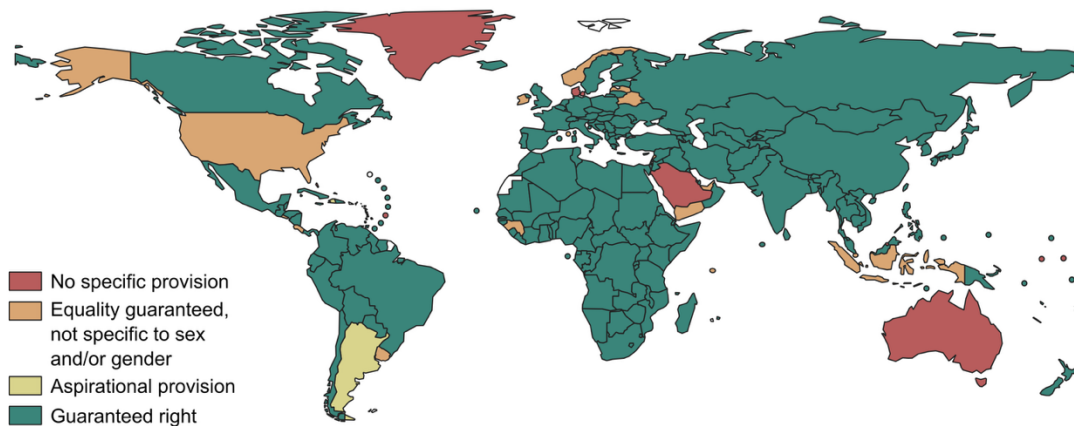
Testimony on Prop. 4 – April 21, 2026

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Aleta Sprague and I am a resident of Dorset. I'm here wearing a few hats. The first is as a Commissioner on the Vermont Commission on Women, which is an independent non-partisan state government commission working to advance rights and opportunities for women and girls and gender expansive people in Vermont.

The second is as the Director of Legal Analysis at the WORLD Policy Analysis Center and the Cofounder of Equal Futures, which is an impact-oriented think tank focused on advancing equality and quality of life around the world. I am also the coauthor of a book published in 2020 through UC Press called *Advancing Equality*, which examines protections for equal rights in the constitutions of all 193 UN member states.

In the few minutes I have I wanted to provide a few findings from our research that can further contextualize Prop 4. As the Committee is aware, a majority of states have now passed equal rights provisions that address sex or gender, and this includes all of the surrounding states, making Vermont an outlier in the northeast. Our data shows that this is in the context of a country that is even more of an outlier on a global scale.

Does the constitution explicitly guarantee equality or non-discrimination across sex and/or gender?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Constitutions Database 2024

What my team has done is systematically analyze the constitutional texts of every country around the world. What we found as of 2024 is that:

- **The vast majority of countries worldwide—86%—take some approach to guaranteeing equal rights on the basis of sex and/or gender.**
 - This includes all but one new constitution adopted since 2000.
 - This also includes countries where the US has advised on constitution drafting - despite not guaranteeing gender equality in our own constitution, we have urged other countries to do so.
- 76% of countries also have explicit equal rights provisions covering race/ethnicity, as do 78% on the basis of religion or belief, 60% on the basis of socioeconomic status, and 59% on the basis of foreign national origin.
- Only 34% cover disability, but this includes 3 out of 4 constitutions adopted since 2010.
- The least constitutionally protected statuses remain sexual orientation and gender identity, but since 1996, countries in every region have adopted explicit constitutional equal rights protections on these grounds.

The US Constitution contains none of these guarantees. In the absence of explicit protections for equal rights, the US Supreme Court has determined over time what kinds of discrimination require heightened scrutiny or higher levels of judicial review. But that approach to interpreting the Equal Protection Clause has led to inconsistent levels of protections for different groups. It has also led to some of the more textualist Supreme Court justices to [question](#) whether some people, including women, are even entitled to constitutional equal rights.

Vermont is in a position to help close these gaps. Enshrining a comprehensive equal rights provision within the constitution of Vermont would both bring our constitution into better alignment with national and global standards and send an important message about the equal dignity and worth of everyone living in our state. Constitutional rights have both practical and normative value, and at a time when equal rights are under attack at a national level, the latter should not be overlooked.

I thank the Committee for their time and would invite anyone interested in how equal rights provisions compare globally to access the resources on our website, equalfutures.org.

Additional resources:

Equal Futures (2026). [Protections for Equal Rights In Constitutions Worldwide.](#)

Equal Futures, [Constitutions Data](#).

Heymann, J., Sprague, A., & Raub, A. (2020). [Advancing Equality: How Constitutional Rights Can Make a Difference Worldwide](#) (open access) (UC Press).

Marcy Syms Equality Initiative (2024). [Model Policy Agenda for State Equal Rights Amendments](#).

Sprague, A., Heymann, J., & Raub, A. (2022). [The Equal Rights Amendment in global context: Gender equality in constitutions worldwide and the potential of more comprehensive approaches](#). *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 38-57.