

To: VT House Committee on Judiciary,

Re. April 21, 2026, Testimony Proposal 4 Equal Rights Amendment to the VT Constitution

Eleanor Roosevelt was an American political figure, First Lady, diplomat and activist. She coined the phrase 'well-behaved women seldom make history.' She served as the United States delegate to the United Nations General Assembly and took a lead role in gaining support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. President Harry Truman called her the "First Lady of the World" in tribute to her human rights achievements.

My late mother, Emma Burke was also a human rights activist, although not as well known. My late brother, Lenny Burke survived a TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) in 1979, which would have left him living the remainder of his life in an institution. Lenny accompanied my mom as she was invited to co-sponsor Social Policy with VT's Senator Leahy, a policy that set a precedent in VT, as VT's Brandon Training School was mandated to be shut down after the 1990 American with Disabilities Act Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision and policies were needed for Residential Care Homes in lieu of institutionalization.

In 1983, my mom received a Congressional Grant to create the Intellectual Property of Licensed Residential Care homes under Subclass K Comparative and Uniform Law. Lenny Burke Farm Inc., established in 1987, VT's first residential care home was the outcome of her blood, sweat and tears. Her selfless work stopped the institutionalization of those with Traumatic Brain Injury in VT.

My daughter, Martha Kourebanas, who has autism, also an ADA protected disability under the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision, also faced being institutionalized in her adulthood. I had intended in following in my mother's footsteps in licensing a home for her to age in place. Our families bought a home for this purpose but quickly realized my daughter, and myself were facing discrimination, regardless of my late mother's work under Congressional authority. Sadly, the Federal government had NOT implemented my mother's work into uniform law to make and enforce a contract under the authority granted to her. I have no doubt that my mother would have addressed Congress to discuss this, but she was not aware that the authority she was given, was also taken.

Women will continue to face unfair policies and rules because the constitution has not formally acknowledged a woman's worth in American society. The United States House Judiciary Resolution 28- "Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States relative to equal rights for men and women" was introduced but it sits without a signature even though it has been sponsored and received Senate support. In my opinion and lived experience, this lack of authorized signature at the Federal level is a US Constitutional abuse of power against women and malfeasance in office. This trickles down to all states and impedes innovation.

Please honor the US Constitution and vote YES for Equal Rights under the Law in VT's Proposal 4. VT's Constitutional Amendment of Equal Rights under the Law will not take your rights away, it will show that you respect women and do not wish us harm. One nation under God, without federal and state sanctioned discrimination against women.

Thank you,

Kathleen Burke Kourebanas, in honor of my late mother, my daughter and all the women in my life