



**WINDHAM COUNTY
VERMONT NAACP**

Testimony in Support of Proposition 4

To: House Judiciary Committee

From: Rutland Area NAACP and Windham County NAACP

Re: Testimony in Support of Proposition 4, Vermont Constitutional Equal Rights Amendment

Date: April 27, 2026

Dear Chair Lalonde and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Rutland Area NAACP and the Windham County NAACP, we write in strong support of Proposition 4, the Vermont Constitutional Equal Rights Amendment.

The NAACP's mission is rooted in the fight for political, educational, social, and economic equality, and in the elimination of race-based discrimination. From that foundation, Proposition 4 is not only appropriate, it is necessary.

At its core, Proposition 4 asks Vermont to make a clear constitutional promise: that the State shall not deny equal treatment under the law because of a person's race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or national origin. It also preserves the ability to adopt measures intended to provide equality of treatment and opportunity for groups that have historically faced discrimination.

Civil rights protections cannot only be about preventing individual acts of discrimination after harm has already happened. They must also allow government to recognize when discrimination has been built into systems, laws, policies, practices, and outcomes, and then take meaningful steps to repair that harm. Equality is not protected by pretending history did not happen. Equality is protected when government has both the responsibility and the authority to stop creating unequal outcomes and correct them where they already exist.

Some have suggested that Vermont already has anti-discrimination laws, and therefore constitutional protection is unnecessary. Respectfully, that misunderstands both history and the purpose of constitutional rights.

Statutes matter, but statutes can be weakened. They can be narrowed. They can be delayed. They can be underfunded. They can be ignored. Constitutional protections carry a different weight. They tell courts, lawmakers, agencies, and the public that equality is not optional, temporary, or dependent on the political climate of the moment. It is a foundational commitment.

We also want to directly address the suggestion that discrimination and disparate impact are no longer meaningful concerns. From the NAACP's perspective, that claim is not only inaccurate, it is dangerous. Communities across Vermont still experience unequal outcomes in housing, education, health care, policing, economic opportunity, public safety, and access to government systems. These disparities do not appear by accident. They are often the result of policies and practices that may look neutral on paper but fall unevenly in real life.

As one of the most visible civil rights organizations in the state, we regularly receive reports of discrimination in schools, housing, employment, criminal justice and public accommodations. Our branches combined have received 11 formal complaints in just the first four months of 2026.

That is why equal protection language matters.

The question is not whether every act of discrimination is obvious, intentional, or spoken out loud. The question is whether government systems are treating people with equal dignity, equal access, and equal protection under the law. Proposition 4 gives Vermont a stronger foundation to answer that question honestly.

We are also concerned by efforts to narrow this debate by isolating one protected group and treating their inclusion as a threat to everyone else. That is an old tactic in civil rights fights. When opponents cannot easily argue against equality as a whole, they often select one community, make that community seem dangerous or confusing, and then use fear of that group to weaken protections for everyone.

That is why the inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression must be understood as part of a broader civil rights framework. These protections do not sit outside the work of racial justice. They are connected to it. Many Vermonters live at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, and national origin. A Black transgender person, a queer immigrant, a disabled woman of color, or a gender-nonconforming student are not living separate civil rights issues. They are living one life, and the law should be strong enough to protect their full humanity.

Civil rights protections lose their moral force when they are only applied to people who are politically convenient to defend. The NAACP understands this history well. Every major civil rights advancement has been met with claims that it goes too far, changes too much, creates confusion, or threatens the existing order. Those arguments were used against racial integration. They were used against voting rights. They were used against disability rights. They were used against marriage equality. They are now being used against transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

Vermont should not repeat that pattern.

The language in Proposition 4 does not create a constitutional crisis. It creates a constitutional commitment. Terms like race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are already part of modern civil rights conversations, legal frameworks, institutional policies, and lived reality. The fact that some people are uncomfortable with those protections does not make them vague. It makes them necessary.

We also want to speak to the argument that if Vermont is already doing well, then we do not need this amendment. That argument is exactly why constitutional protection matters. Rights should not depend on whether current leaders believe they are doing a good job. Rights should not depend on trust alone. Communities that have experienced discrimination know that good intentions are not the same as accountability.

If Vermont believes it is committed to equal treatment, then it should have no fear of saying so in its Constitution.

Proposition 4 also aligns with Vermont's existing constitutional values. The proposal recognizes that Chapter I, Article 1 declares that all persons are born equally free and independent, and that Article 7 states government exists for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people. Proposition 4 does not abandon Vermont's constitutional tradition. It strengthens it.

This amendment is not about special rights. It is about equal rights.

It is not about taking anything away from anyone. It is about making sure the government cannot deny equal treatment to people who have too often been denied dignity, safety, opportunity, and protection.

It is not about division. It is about whether Vermont's Constitution will reflect the full humanity of all people who live here.

For our branches, this issue is deeply connected to our broader civil rights work. We know that racial justice cannot be separated from disability justice, gender justice, LGBTQ+ justice, immigrant justice, and economic justice. The same systems that deny one community's dignity are often used to deny another's. Our liberation is tied together, and our laws should reflect that truth.

The committee has an opportunity to move Vermont toward a stronger, clearer, and more durable civil rights foundation. Proposition 4 has already gone through a long process. It has passed the Senate unanimously. Now the question before this committee is whether Vermonters will be allowed to vote on whether equality belongs in their Constitution.

The answer should be yes.

The Rutland Area NAACP and Windham County NAACP urge the House Judiciary Committee to vote Proposition 4 out of committee and allow the people of Vermont to decide.

Vermont should not be timid in the face of discrimination. It should be clear.

Vermont should not ask historically marginalized communities to keep proving that harm exists before their rights are protected. It should listen.

And Vermont should not leave equality only in statute when it belongs in the Constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

Rutland Area NAACP

Windham County NAACP