

# Sarasota puts Florida on notice: Ratify Equal Rights Amendment

By Timothy Fanning  
tim.fanning@  
heralddtribune.com

**SARASOTA —** The Equal Rights Amendment. It's 24 words.

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Emerging from an effort that started in the 1920s, it earned approval from Congress in 1972 and awaits ratification from three-fourths of the states.

It's one state shy, and Florida could be that state.

State Rep. Margaret Good and members of the Sarasota chapter of the American Association of University Women sat before the Sarasota City Commission on Monday seeking approval of a resolution urging the state Legislature to take up the matter.

City commissioners unanimously agreed to send a signal to Tallahassee.

"We are about to pass a resolution and act on something that we didn't have the right to do until recently and wouldn't be able to do without the right to vote," said Commissioner Shelli Freeland Eddie.

The resolution asks Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature to ratify the amendment,

something 37 states have already done. Thirty-eight states are needed, and Illinois became the 37th last May.

State legislators have repeatedly introduced the amendment since 2003. However, it has not reached the full House or Senate. St. Petersburg and Tampa city councils approved resolutions in support of the ERA. So has Holmes Beach and Hillsborough County. The Hillsborough County Commission also has approved a resolution and the Sarasota County Commission is to consider it this month.

"Basic to women's success is the notion that we are equal members of society, yet that is not recognized in the document that is the cornerstone of our society," said Good, who asked the commission to support the symbolic move.

This sends a signal to the Republican-controlled state House and Senate to take action, said Ellen Roche, the former president of the Sarasota chapter of the American Association of University Women, a national organization that pushes for equality for women.

"This isn't a Republican or a Democrat issue," said Roche. "It's not black and white. It's the nation standing up and saying

that it is willing to say it believes in equal rights."

The Equal Rights Amendment would guarantee equal legal rights for all Americans, regardless of sex, proponents say. It would require states to intervene in cases of gender violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. It would also guard against pregnancy and motherhood discrimination and would federally guarantee equal pay.

Twenty-two state legislatures quickly ratified it in 1972, but then opposition from conservatives opposed to the women's movement halted ratification.

"The reasons the opponents gave were things like it might cause same-sex marriage, create unisex bathrooms, or allow women to go into combat," said Commissioner Liz Alpert. "All of those things, those 'horrible things' have come to pass. It is way past time discrimination based on the basis of sex is never again a question, no matter who is in power."

Next year, the United States celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Voting is the only right the Constitution explicitly extends to both men and women.