

Written Testimony for Thursday Williams

College Student and ERA Coalition Board Member

Submitted to the Committee on the Judiciary for the Hearing

“Equal Rights Amendment: How Congress Can Recognize Ratification and Enshrine  
Equality in Our Constitution”

Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Thursday Williams. I am currently a senior at Trinity College in Connecticut, and I serve on the board of the ERA Coalition. It is such an honor to be here today testifying on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Thank you, Senator Durbin, for inviting me to share my story of why the Equal Rights Amendment is important to me, my peers, and my generation. We are at a tipping point; the future of our democracy is at stake. The ERA holds the promise of a brighter future for us all.

My family came to this country from Jamaica, seeking the American dream of education and productivity—and my mission is to fulfill that dream. I proudly became a citizen, was accepted into a competitive college, took on leadership roles, became president of Trinity College Black Women’s Organization, and engaged in spirited debates about rights and freedom.

I fell in love with the United States Constitution in high school when I participated in Constitutional debates through the Legal Outreach Program. I argued multiple constitutional issues at NYU and Brooklyn Law School, including the equal protection clause, the Fourth Amendment, and voting rights. What I love the most about the Constitution is how brilliantly it

was designed to adapt to the changing needs of its people. Our founding fathers were visionaries. They understood that we needed a document that could endure throughout generations. That's when I knew, this was the thing for me. I wanted to study law. I wanted to be one of the change makers.

During my senior year of high school, I had the opportunity to perform in an award-winning Broadway play, *What the Constitution Means to Me*. Each night I debated why we should keep the Constitution. There was a part in the play where I was talking about inequality, and I was thinking about the fact that not so long ago I would've been considered property. Not so long ago I wouldn't even have had the opportunity to stand on stage as a Black woman. In my closing argument during one performance, I stopped mid-show, and just stood there crying my eyes out at the idea. Here I am defending a Constitution that at one point considered me three-fifths of a person, a Constitution that doesn't explicitly recognize women in it, a Constitution that in 2023 still doesn't explicitly state that I'm equal to a man. For the first time, it was clear to me that this document was not written for me. Nevertheless, I will continue to defend this Constitution and fight for my rightful place in it.

This is why I am here today. I am here to defend an amendment that will finally guarantee me equality. After graduating in May, I will be starting my professional career at one of the most prestigious law firms in the country. As exciting as this should be, I proceed with caution because I am aware that although I am as capable as any man, the system is stacked against me. As a woman of color, I am more likely to be offered less than a man for the same work. I am more likely to be overlooked for raises and promotions. I will have to work twice as hard to get the same recognition as my male colleagues and right now I will have limited recourse to fight against it. This is why it is important for myself, my peers, and future generations to have the

Equal Rights Amendment. We deserve a Constitution that guarantees equality regardless of sex.  
A Constitution that we can use as a tool to fight discrimination.

The Equal Rights Amendment has fulfilled all requirements to be added to the Constitution, now it's time for it to be recognized. If we continue to hold back more than half of our people from accessing equal opportunities, what does that say about us as a country? How can we be the beacon of freedom and democracy we claim to be if we do not declare that sex discrimination contradicts the American dream? The ERA will make the Constitution a more perfect document, so we can have a more perfect union. It is time we stop disappointing the future generation.