Senator Cannizzaro presenting Senate Joint Resolution 8, Equal Rights

Remarks by Majority Leader Nicole Cannizzaro
Before the Senate Committee on Legislative Operations and Elections
May 31, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and committee members, I am Nicole Cannizzaro representing Senate District 6 in Northwest Las Vegas, and I am pleased to come before you this morning to present Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 8, which proposes to amend the Nevada Constitution to guarantee equal rights.

Federal Equal Rights Amendment
The federal Equal Rights Amendment, or ERA, is a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution designed to guarantee equal legal rights for all American citizens regardless of sex.

As a bit of history, in 1972 Congress passed the federal ERA and sent it to the states for ratification. At that time, Congress set a seven-year time limit for ratification in the resolving clause of the amendment. This was later extended to June of 1982. Thirty-five of the necessary 38 states ratified the ERA between 1972 and 1977.
On March 22, 2017, 45 years after the ERA was submitted to Congress, Nevada became the first state to ratify the ERA after the expiration of the June 30, 1982, deadline. The State of Illinois followed with ratification on May 30, 2018. Thirty-seven states have now ratified the ERA.

The Nevada Legislature approved state SJR 2, which supported Nevada’s ratification in 2017. When this resolution was discussed, one of the questions posed was, “Is the ERA still necessary?” I believe there is evidence of the need for every state, and the nation as a whole, to guarantee equal rights to all persons, and base equal rights upon more than sex only. Wholistic equal rights refer to all of the parts that make a person whole, including the mind, body, and spirit.

**Inequities Continue to Exist in Our Society**

Inequalities continue to exist today across many topics.¹ According to the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, there are inequalities in:

**The Job Market**: Racial discrimination continues to be pervasive in the U.S. labor market. Compared to white individuals, black individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed.²

**Wages**: Pay equity—or should I say, pay inequity—is still a significant concern. Although the gender pay gap is narrowing, according to the Pew Research Center, women in the U.S. earn just 85 percent of what their male

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counterparts earn.³ When looking at women of color, black women typically make only 60 percent, and Latinas make 50 percent of what white, non-Hispanic male counterparts make.⁴

A common theme of work force issues for women is the lack of paid leave and affordable child care, which are critical to women joining the labor force and narrowing the gender wage gap. This Session, we approved Senate Bill 312, which requires a private employer, with 50 or more employees, to provide paid leave to each employee.⁵ Equal rights continue to be relevant.

**Crimes:** When it comes to crimes against persons, we continue to suffer from victim-blaming, such as shame, stigma, and the ingraining of guilt upon the victim. In the last few years, we have clearly heard the voices of women that sexual harassment in the work place happens frequently and often silently. The #MeToo movement has supported a significant increase in sex-based discrimination filings. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) saw a 13.6 percent increase in workers alleging sexual harassment from Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 to FY 2018.⁶

To begin the journey of addressing sexual discrimination and harassment in Nevada, we now have a Governor’s Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Law and Policy to reduce harassment in the Executive Branch.⁷

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⁷ Nevada Executive Department, Executive Order 2019-02 Order To Collect Sexual Harassment And Discrimination Policies From Marijuana And Gaming Privileged License Holders And State Vendors, http://gov.nv.gov/News/Executive_Orders/2019/2019-
In addition, the 2019 Nevada Legislature has approved Assembly Bill 397, which relates to misconduct by certain public officers. Clearly, we continue to struggle with discrimination and victim-blaming.

**Homelessness:** There are 750,000 persons who are homeless on any given night. The ranks of the sheltered homeless include disproportionate numbers of males, blacks, middle-aged persons, veterans, and the disabled.

**Immigrants and Inequality:** Immigrants face many inequities, including access to resources, employment opportunities, social benefits, and health care.

**State Equal Rights Amendments**

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, I am before you today because I believe in the foundations of the ERA and what it stands for—for ALL people. I believe that every state should exemplify human rights and our state constitution should guarantee equal rights for ALL.

**Senate Joint Resolution 8**

The time is NOW to show the nation that we, as Nevadans, lead when it comes to equality for all. At every decision point in history, the quest for equality has met with stiff and obstinate opposition. Equal justice has NEVER been given. We must persist in this effort to achieve equal rights.

There are nearly 30 states that have passed or are considering state equal rights amendments to their constitutions. Most provide for the equality of rights to not be abridged or denied because of sex. The measure before you today clarifies that the equality of rights should not only be based upon the
sex of an individual, but on the wholistic aspects of all persons, which includes the mind, body, and spirit. Senate Joint Resolution 8 provides that the equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by this state or any of its political subdivisions on account of:

- Race;
- Color;
- Creed;
- Sex;
- Sexual orientation;
- Gender identity or expression;
- Age;
- Disability; and
- Ancestry or national origin.

**Closing Remarks**

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, I urge your support of SJR 8. We must persist in the name of all that is good. We must continue on this road until we have equal rights for ALL in our state.

Thank you.

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