

Winston & Strawn Joins National ERA Coalition as the First Law Firm to Serve as a Lead Organization

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CHICAGO – Winston & Strawn has joined the national ERA Coalition—a group of organizations working toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The first law firm to serve as a Coalition “Lead Organization,” Winston has been active in the campaign to ratify the ERA since 2017. After playing a role in the Illinois General Assembly’s historic ratification in 2018, the firm is continuing to dedicate time, talent, and expertise to the effort. Going forward, Winston Partner Linda Coberly—the firm’s Chicago Office Managing Partner, and Chair of its Appellate & Critical Motions Practice—will serve as Chair of the Coalition’s Legal Task Force.

“This is a natural extension of the firm’s commitment to ensuring equal protection under the law for all Americans and advancing the cause of equity for women,” said firm Chairman Tom Fitzgerald.

The ERA Coalition represents 76 member and lead organizations that advocate for state and federal constitutional amendments to guarantee equal rights regardless of sex. The ERA Coalition’s [polling research](#) shows that 94% of Americans support constitutional equality for women and men.

Congress passed the ERA in 1972 with overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle. By the time a congressional deadline passed in 1982, 35 states had ratified—three short of the 38 required for a constitutional amendment. Decades later—in the wake of the Women’s March in early 2017—the State of Nevada voted to ratify the amendment, becoming the 36th state and reviving the movement.

Inspired by Nevada’s historic action, Winston launched a committee to work on the issue, and the firm joined with activists working to make Illinois the next state to ratify. Winston lawyers and staff convened meetings and events, performed research, prepared materials, offered a webinar for activists and legislators, and provided testimony at the key committee hearing. Winston staff also submitted “witness slips” and called their elected representatives.

In May 2018, the Illinois General Assembly voted to ratify the Amendment, making Illinois the 37th state to ratify. One more state ratification is needed. In the meantime, Congress will soon consider legislation to eliminate the deadline that it placed on ratification years ago.

Winston is actively involved in ratification efforts in both North Carolina and Virginia. Partners from the firm’s Washington, D.C. office are actively engaged with activists in Virginia. In November 2018, Linda Coberly spoke at a symposium at William & Mary Law School in Virginia exploring the continuing importance of the ERA, its relationship

with other laws and constitutional provisions, and the remaining obstacles to ratification and how they can be surmounted.

First introduced in Congress almost 100 years ago, the ERA reads, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Since the movement stalled in the early 1980s, the ERA has been reintroduced in Congress every session, and it has recently gained new momentum. In December, Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY), the incoming chairman of the House Judiciary committee, announced that the committee would hold hearings in early 2019 about eliminating Congress’s prior deadline on ratification of the ERA. Last week, Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-CA) introduced a joint resolution in the House to lift the deadline. Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) have introduced a similar resolution in the Senate.

“We’re beyond grateful that Winston & Strawn is making this commitment to the ratification of the ERA,” said ERA Coalition Co-President Carol Jenkins. “There is an urgent need right now in our country to ensure that women’s voices are heard and respected. Advocates like Linda Coberly and so many others have a critical role to play.”

ERA Coalition Co-Founder and Co-President Jessica Neuwirth said that the coalition’s Lead Organizations are honored to have Winston join their efforts. “The firm’s leadership in the legal community has already moved the cause of constitutional equality forward. Their work in educating legislators, activists, and the public on the legal issues around the amendment have been invaluable to us.”

Learn more about Winston’s [commitment to secure equal rights for women](#) through ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

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