

REASONS TO VOTE YES ON PROPOSAL 4

Vermont has long prided itself on being a leader in civil rights, often setting a standard for equal treatment in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Yet, a critical gap remains: the Vermont Constitution lacks explicit, constitutional-level protections guaranteeing equal protection under the law for everyone. Proposal 4 is our opportunity to fix that. It reads as follows on the November 3 ballot:

That the people are guaranteed equal protection under the law. The State shall not deny equal treatment under the law on account of a person's race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or national origin. Nothing in this Article shall be interpreted or applied to prevent the adoption or implementation of measures intended to provide equality of treatment and opportunity for members of groups that have historically been subject to discrimination.

A **YES** vote explicitly prohibits the state from denying equal rights to anyone based on who they are. It ensures that no Vermonter faces discrimination, unequal treatment, or social exclusion because of their background, identity, or community. The proposal's language is clear: adding these protections does not limit any existing rights, nor does it elevate one group at the expense of another. Equity is not a zero-sum game.

Vermont has long stood out as a leader in civil rights, extending statutory protections in employment, housing, and public accommodations. But statutory protections are inherently fragile—what one legislature passes, a future legislature can modify or repeal. Constitutional rights are permanent. Enshrining these principles in our constitution ensures that our protections endure regardless of political shifts.

At its core, Proposal 4 is about guaranteeing everyone a dignified life. It establishes a constitutional benchmark that state policy must actively work toward substantive equity—not merely equality on paper. Economically, it affirms the right of every resident to a fair opportunity to work, earn a living, and support their family. It recognizes that access to housing, healthcare, and education forms the bedrock of individual freedom and community well-being.

Will Proposal 4 increase government spending? While we cannot say that there could never be litigation or implementation costs, any claims that adoption would guarantee increased government spending are not based in fact by legislative fiscal analysis. Protecting fundamental civil rights is a core function of government, not an unsustainable expense.

Proposal 4 is not a partisan initiative—it is a reflection of shared Vermont values. Originally sponsored by 23 state senators and backed by legislative leadership, the measure earned near-unanimous, bipartisan support through consecutive legislative sessions spanning 2024 to 2026 before being formally proclaimed for the ballot.

The choice before us is simple: regular laws are subject to political whims, but constitutional rights are an unshakeable promise. Proposal 4 makes perfect sense because it ensures that our State Constitution finally stands for everyone who calls Vermont home.

Declaration of Inclusion Initiative – Bob Harnish, Al Wakefield, Norm Cohen, Marsha Cassel, Amanda Van Eps, Gabriella Netsch, Patti Lancaster, Karimah Edwards, Rebecca Majoya, Barbara Noyes Pulling