NYCLU, NIRH and Planned Parenthood Demand Special Session to Pass the Equality Amendment

Amid nationwide attacks on reproductive rights, New York State legislature fails to protect pregnant people, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities in state constitution

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 3, 2022
MEDIA CONTACT: Arianna Fishman, afishman@nyclu.org, 212-607-3372
Emma Corbett, emma.corbett@ppesacts.org, 518.852.0146
Olivia Lapeyrolerie, olapeyrolerie@skdknick.com

ALBANY, NY – The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), National Institute for Reproductive Health Action Fund (NIRH AF), and Planned Parenthood Empire State Acts (PPESA) are calling for the legislature to return to Albany for a special session after it failed to pass the Equality Amendment. The legislature must pass the amendment by the end of calendar year 2022 so that New Yorkers are able to vote on the measure in 2024. Without this, the Equality Amendment would not reach voters until 2026, an unacceptable delay as the fight over abortion rights rages across the country, along with growing threats to LGBTQ+ individuals and the continued impacts of racism and racial violence.

The Equality Amendment (S.8797A/A.10468A) would fill critical gaps in New York state’s constitution to prohibit discrimination based on a person’s race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, and sex – including pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Despite the fact that religious freedom is already robustly protected in our state constitution, a small right-wing contingent has weaponized religion to stop the amendment, leaving other groups without constitutional protections and vulnerable to discrimination.

“The New York State legislature has ended this session failing to pass the most vital protection it could -- an Equality Amendment that would protect rights, freedoms, and bodily autonomy for all New Yorkers,” said Andrea Miller, President of the National Institute for Reproductive Health Action Fund. “This is a moment of crisis. The Supreme Court is set to overturn Roe v. Wade, states are passing anti-LGBTQ laws, and systemic racism is resulting in violent extremism across the country and here in New York. New Yorkers are keenly aware of these threats, and expect New York’s leaders to take meaningful action. The Legislature’s work is not done. We demand they come back to Albany to finish the job and pass an Equality Amendment.”
“The legislature’s failure to pass the Equality Amendment shows that New York is not immune from the type of right wing religious pressure that seeks to deny people the fundamental equality that they want and deserve. But rights are not a zero-sum game: extending equality protections to New Yorkers who are currently excluded from our state constitution is not about religion. Privileging religion is a thinly-veiled pretext for an agenda of stopping abortion and legalizing discrimination against LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, undermining the very equality protections that the amendment is designed to provide,” said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. “The nation’s spotlight is on New York to be an abortion access state, and Albany leadership must meet the moment with courage, not political chess. We call on the legislature to do right by women, LGBTQ+ people, and all who need constitutional protection against discrimination and pass the Equality Amendment in a special session as soon as possible.”

“It is deeply disappointing that in this moment, one where the Supreme Court is poised to dismantle abortion rights and other fundamental freedoms, that New York lawmakers failed to pass an equality amendment that would have provided discrimination protections for every New Yorker. New York is not immune to the dire situation unfolding federally and in states across this country. At a time when New York should be leading the fight for equality, we failed to meet the gravity of the moment. New Yorkers overwhelmingly see discrimination as a problem, and a solution must be delivered. Lawmakers left Albany with unfinished business on the table – and we demand they return to Albany to get the equality amendment done,” said Georgana Hanson, interim President and CEO of Planned Parenthood Empire State Acts.

A newly released poll shows that New Yorkers overwhelmingly support passing an Equality Amendment – and have an expectation for lawmakers to step up and take meaningful action. This week, the coalition and supporters rallied in Albany as a projection illuminated the Egg demanding that the amendment pass this legislative session.

###