

# Why A Sign4ERA Petition Drive?

## *The Power of Public Demand*

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Petitioning Congress is one of the oldest democratic tools available to people in the United States. Long before mass media, email, or online organizing, petitions were the primary way ordinary people could directly assert their grievances and demand action from government.

The right “to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” is guaranteed in the [First Amendment](#). The First Congress of the United States received hundreds of petitions — from veterans seeking pay, to citizens raising concerns about taxation, slavery, and federal structures. Petitioning was seen as a duty of citizenship, not just a right.

Petitioning was not symbolic — it was strategic. It demonstrated mass public support and forced Congress to confront issues it wanted to avoid.

People Ask: What does signing a petition actually do in 2026? It's an especially sharp question for the ERA, which has been petitioned, rallied, and marched for in every decade since 1923.

The answer is specific, strategic, and rooted in both constitutional history and political science research: a petition of 300,000 signers, organized by Congressional district, is more than a symbolic gesture.

## An Honest Answer to "What Does Signing Do?"

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A petition signature does three things:

**First**, it registers a constituent. When a voter signs at Sign4ERA.org, their ZIP code ties that signature to a specific Congressional district. This builds a district-by-district map of visible, identified ERA supporters — voters who have taken a public action and can be mobilized again. It is a constituent database organized by the unit of representation that matters most to a member of Congress: their own district.

**Second**, it creates accountability pressures. A Member of Congress who sees thousands of identified signatures from their district and has not yet taken a position faces a specific, named, quantifiable constituency asking a yes-or-no question on an issue.

**Third**, it converts passive support into active demand. Polling consistently shows 80% or more of Americans support the ERA in principle. A signed petition converts a polling number into a person — a voter with a ZIP code and a demonstrated willingness to show up. That conversion is what makes 1 million signatures strategically significant rather than merely large.

## The Historical Precedent: Petitions and Constitutional Change

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At the [Seneca Falls Convention in 1848](#), activists including Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, itself a form of petition. Suffragists used state and national petition drives for decades to push for voting rights. By the early 1900s, activists delivered hundreds of thousands of signatures to Congress demanding the amendment that would become the 19th Amendment.

## 1910s: Suffrage Petitions as Proof of Mandate

The [suffrage petition campaigns](#) of the 1910s were deliberate Congressional strategy, not just grassroots enthusiasm. The [National American Women's Suffrage Association's](#) leadership — including [Carrie Chapman Catt](#), the same woman who christened Alice Burke's Golden Flyer — used petition drives specifically to demonstrate to wavering senators that the 19th Amendment had popular mandate before it ever came to a vote on the floor.

The [1917 New York State suffrage referendum](#) was preceded by a petition drive that collected over one million signatures — a figure that made it impossible for state legislators to claim their constituents were indifferent. New York's ratification shifted the national calculus and put the 19th Amendment on an unstoppable path. The petition wasn't the victory. It was the key that opened the door to the victory.

## 1980s–90s: The 27th Amendment and a Letter Writing Campaign

When University of Texas student [Gregory Watson](#) discovered in 1982 that James Madison's 1789 congressional pay amendment had never been ratified by enough states, he began a letter-writing campaign to state legislatures. It took a decade. By the time Michigan ratified in 1992 — making it the 38th state — the campaign had demonstrated something that constitutional scholars considered impossible: a 203-year-old amendment with no deadline could be ratified simply by sustained, organized public pressure on state legislatures.

## 2020s: Petition Science and Congressional Behavior

Modern political science research has produced specific findings about petitions and legislative behavior that the Driving the Vote for Equality campaign's strategy reflects directly.

A 2014 study published in the [American Political Science Review](#) found that petitioning empowered those engaged to become active leaders and organizers not only at present, but decades into the future, and ultimately build communities of activists, with the petition itself becoming a genesis for dialogues, contacts, and collaboration.

The [Sign4ERA.org](#) campaign is designed around this research. Every signature is a *constituent*, not a *count*. The 300,000 goal is not chosen arbitrarily — it is chosen because at that scale, distributed across 435 Congressional districts, every single competitive district in America has a visible, named, organized constituency demanding a floor vote on the ERA.

## The Word That Matters: Affirm, Not Ratify

ERA NOW's call to action is precise, and the precision is intentional. People sign the National ERA Petition with a call to action to tell Congress that they strongly support the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution which reads:

*Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States of by any state on account of sex.*

Congress is being asked to **affirm** the ERA — the one that already exists, that 38 states have already ratified, that meets every Article V requirement.

Email, web-based forms, and national online platforms have transformed petitioning from handing Congress a stack of paper to mobilizing signatures. But, the constitutional principle remains exactly the same as in 1789.

## At a Glance

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**80%+**

of Americans support the ERA in principle — but principle without organized demand is invisible to Congress

**300K**

signature goal by end of June — organized by Congressional district to create direct constituent pressure

**218**

House signatures needed to pass a Joint Resolution in the House and for a discharge petition requiring that a resolution get to the House Floor.

**25**

states on the Driving the Vote for Equality Tour route — each stop amplifying the signature count with organized events