

RESIST. REBUILD.

REIMAGINE.

Turning this Moment into Lasting Change



GENDER
JUSTICE

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

Dear Supporters,



MEGAN PETERSON
Executive Director
(she/hers)

“

A BETTER WORLD
IS POSSIBLE.
TOGETHER, WE'RE
ALREADY BUILDING IT.

”

We are living through something extraordinary.

Facing wave after wave of state violence, it would be easy to assume the direction of change is toward more authoritarianism. I don't believe that's inevitable. What I see — in Minnesota and across the country — is people coming together not only to resist, but to rebuild and reimagine, even as we fight for our lives.

We saw it here. When Operation Metro Surge launched, Minnesotans mobilized massive networks of neighbors and mutual aid. It wasn't just a rejection of the violent, white supremacist worldview ICE embodies — it was a deepening of our commitment to one another. Fighting for our neighbors' rights as our own. Together, we forced a drawdown. The threat isn't over, but we proved something important: organized people are powerful.

Now, we're doing the long work of recovery and accountability. We honor our neighbors Renée Good, Alex Pretti and Victor Manuel Díaz by demanding more than a return to the status quo — by building toward something better.

The **Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment** is a key piece of that work: a way to defend our rights today and assert a clear vision that Minnesota's own resources, laws and institutions will never be weaponized against our own people — and embed that vision directly in our state's constitution, where it cannot be easily rolled back by shifting political winds.

What gives me hope is that this pairing — fierce resistance while building the foundations for something better — isn't new. It's a signature of movements for racial justice, immigrant rights, trans liberation, indigenous sovereignty, and reproductive freedom. At Gender Justice, we channel that same determination through the law — building legal frameworks that don't just push back against today's attacks, but make equality harder to dismantle tomorrow.

We see that in the story of **Cooper v. USA Powerlifting**. In 2019, our client took a stand against discrimination that blocked her from participating in the sport she loved. Her persistence brought us all the way to the Minnesota Supreme Court — where, this fall, we won a ruling that didn't just affirm trans athletes' right to compete. It established a clear legal precedent: in Minnesota, trans people have the right to participate authentically in every part of public life.

That's the work. And we're not done. We've appealed **T.D. v. Wrigley** to the North Dakota Supreme Court, challenging the state's ban on gender-affirming care for trans youth — a ban that criminalizes doctors and overrides North Dakotans' constitutional right to liberty and self-determination. We've seen this argument win: Montana's Supreme Court recently struck down a similar ban on state constitutional grounds.

None of this comes easy. The forces working against us are coordinated and well-resourced. But I've seen what's possible when people refuse to accept the world as it is. In courtrooms, in the streets, in the Capitol — in Minnesota and North Dakota — we are proving that freedom and dignity are worth defending, and worth building toward. As long as we keep showing up for one another, I believe we will do just that.

A better world is possible. Together, we're already building it. Thank you for all the ways — big and small — you're showing up today, tomorrow, and for our future.

In solidarity,



Democracy Depends on Bodily Autonomy

In late 2024, as authoritarian threats shifted from rhetoric to reality, we knew where the first blows would land. History teaches us that gender-based violence is a feature, not a bug, of oppressive systems. From the surveillance of reproductive care to the criminalization of gender and sexuality — attacks on democracy often begin with attacks on bodily autonomy.

That's why we made it a priority to help relaunch the Minnesota Democracy Defense Table. This "Big Tent" network of nearly 90 organizations — including labor unions, civil rights groups and faith voices — serves as a well-coordinated, networked hub for Minnesota's resistance to authoritarianism.

Our preparation was put to the test when Operation Metro Surge launched in late 2025. Because we were already at the table, we were able to move quickly — ensuring that even in the chaos of a federal surge, the safety of women, trans and LGBTQ+ folks, and survivors was a core part of our collective response.

HOW WE'RE SHOWING UP:



Providing Core Leadership

Executive Director Megan Peterson serves on the Table's Core Team, co-leads the Elected Officials Spoke, and serves as the bridge to the Legal Spoke.



Documenting State Violence

We launched a confidential legal intake tool to document gender-based and sexualized violence committed by federal immigration agents, ensuring these abuses are recorded, investigated, and challenged.



Organizing the Legal Spoke

Gender Justice helps guide the Legal Spoke, which includes a legal resource navigator team and legal strategies team working across legal advocacy organizations, legal aid, the private bar, law professors, and legal membership organizations. These groups help streamline and connect movement groups with legal resources and convene legal thought leaders for analysis and strategy.



Mass Mobilization

We helped move 50,000+ Minnesotans into the streets on January 23 and have provided direct action training to more than 5,000 community members to date.

A Landmark Victory for Trans Minnesotans



It's been years in the making. A fight that began with one athlete's courage to stand up against discrimination has now made history.

In a landmark decision, the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled in favor of JayCee Cooper, affirming that USA Powerlifting (USAPL) violated the Minnesota Human Rights Act by banning her — and all transgender athletes — from competition.

At a time when extremists are advancing a coordinated legal, legislative, and messaging campaign to strip trans people of their rights, Minnesota has once again proven itself a leader. This victory is more than a legal win. It is a clear declaration: trans people belong in sports, in our communities, and in every part of public life.

Why This **VICTORY MATTERS**

This win does more than affirm one athlete's right to compete — it clarifies Minnesota law. The Court held that USAPL's ban violated the Minnesota Human Rights Act's protections against discrimination in places of public accommodation. That means businesses and organizations open to the public — including hotels, museums, parks, libraries, and more — cannot exclude trans people.

This case also matters because of what sports have come to represent in our political discourse. Over the past several years, a coordinated national campaign has singled out trans athletes as a wedge issue — using the language of "fairness" and "protecting girls" to falsely frame women's sports as under siege.

It's a familiar authoritarian tactic: manufacture a crisis, stoke fear, and divide communities.

But the real crises in women's sports have nothing to do with trans athletes. They are longstanding systemic failures: unequal funding, sexual harassment, racism, and chronic underinvestment.

Minnesota's Supreme Court refused to let manufactured fear override civil rights law. In doing so, it reinforced something fundamental: fairness does not mean exclusion.

Proof That **WE CAN WIN**

Later this year, the U.S. Supreme Court will rule on whether states can ban trans athletes from participating in school sports. Lawmakers across the country have introduced over 700 anti-trans bills this year alone — including extreme measures in Kansas that void trans people's driver's licenses and create "bathroom bounties." Meanwhile, the federal government is forcing hospitals into an impossible choice: deny gender-affirming care to young patients or risk losing their federal funding entirely.

It is precisely at this moment — as trans people face a coordinated campaign to strip away their rights and dignity — that the Minnesota Supreme Court's decision is so significant.

The ruling may not end the attacks, but it strengthens the legal foundation we stand on in Minnesota. And importantly, it sends a signal far beyond our state: when we fight back — strategically, persistently, and together — we can win.

JayCee's case began in 2019. It required years of litigation, partnership, storytelling, and sustained support. Victories like this do not happen by accident. They happen because supporters like you make it possible for us to stay in the fight long enough to win.



Erin Maye Quade, senior advisor at Gender Justice, speaks at a press conference following oral arguments in JayCee's case in December 2024.



The *real* crises in women's sports are the same systemic barriers that have existed for decades: lack of investment, unequal funding, sexual harassment, and racism. Advocates who work at the intersection of sports and gender equity see this clearly:

"In the National High School Federation's recent survey, we saw that there are 1.3 million fewer opportunities for girls to participate in sports. At one university where I spoke to women athletes about gender equity, I thought I knew what they were going to ask for — to travel and fly everywhere, like the football team. But this young woman raised her hand and said we don't even have shower curtains in our locker room."

– Ashland Johnson, Founder of Inclusion Playbook & Speaker at the 2025 Gender Justice Brunch

Analyzing How United States Supreme Court Decisions Impact Us

This year, the United States Supreme Court (SCOTUS) will decide cases that directly impact our rights – and we know timely and insightful updates on decisions that impact our reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equity in Minnesota and North Dakota, will be crucial. That's why we host our virtual SCOTUS Chat series.

Sign-up to be the first to hear about upcoming SCOTUS chats, where our legal and policy experts gather to discuss the case's immediate effects, future implications, and answer questions directly from the community.

genderjustice.us/work/scotus-chats



Legal Updates

The latest legal developments in our ongoing work:



Cooper v. USA Powerlifting: Fighting for Trans Inclusion in Sports

On October 22, 2025, the Minnesota Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in *Cooper v. USA Powerlifting*, affirming that the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA) protects transgender athletes' right to compete in sports in Minnesota without discrimination. Read more on page 4.



T.D. v. Wrigley: Challenging North Dakota's Trans Healthcare Ban

In February 2025, we concluded our trial challenging North Dakota's sweeping ban on gender-affirming care for trans youth. On October 9, 2025, the Burleigh County District Court upheld the ban. We have appealed to the North Dakota Supreme Court, arguing the ban violates the right to personal autonomy guaranteed under the North Dakota Constitution.



Reyzi Grace v. Academy of Holy Angels and the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis: Fighting LGBTQ+ Workplace Discrimination

In August 2024, we filed a lawsuit on behalf of Reyzi Grace, a secular staff librarian who was fired when she came out as transgender. In September 2025, the Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court's dismissal of the Archdiocese from the case, ruling that a church may fire a secular employee who does not abide by the employer's religious beliefs, even if that employee performs no religious functions. In February 2025, the Minnesota Supreme Court granted our petition for review, and we will argue before the court this year.



Mudra v. Buffalo Wild Wings: Defending Victims of Anti-Trans Discrimination

In August 2025, we filed a charge of discrimination with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights on behalf of Gerika Mudra, a cisgender, biracial high school girl who was harassed by a server at Buffalo Wild Wings and accused of being a boy in the girls' bathroom.



S.R. v. Minnesota Department of Corrections & Swift County: Making Foster Care Safe for Trans Youth

In December 2025, we filed a lawsuit against Swift County and the Minnesota Department of Corrections on behalf of S.R., a transgender girl who entered foster care shortly after coming out and was subjected to relentless bullying, invasive questioning, and repeated sexual harassment. The Minnesota Human Rights Act explicitly prohibits discrimination based on gender identity in all public services, including foster care placements, and Minnesota's Constitution guarantees every Minnesotan the right to equal protection under the law.



Restoring Access to Abortion in North Dakota

In November, the North Dakota Supreme Court reversed a decision from a lower court and allowed the state's abortion ban to go back into effect. While three out of the five Justices found the law unconstitutionally vague, North Dakota requires a majority of at least four judges to declare a law unconstitutional.

THE ERA CAN'T WAIT



In Minnesota, we take care of our neighbors. We have long been a refuge for those seeking safety. But over the last year, we've seen that promise tested. From the federal immigration occupation to the coordinated attempts to erase our trans neighbors from public life, our state's values are under active, systemic assault.

The Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is our line in the sand. It is how we say: in Minnesota, your dignity is not negotiable. You belong here. Your body is not a political battleground. And our state will never use its laws or resources against our own people.

The Power of Constitutional Protections

The ERA would affirm that treating people differently because of their last name, their accent, their race, their gender, disability, pregnancy status, or who they love violates our state's highest legal document. Today, many of Minnesota's protections against discrimination exist only in statute — meaning they can be weakened or erased by a future hostile legislature. By moving these protections into our state constitution, we make equality a fundamental right.

The ERA would be a game-changer for addressing discrimination that is baked into government policies,

programs, and laws. If a state or local government tried to treat someone differently because of one of the protected characteristics, they would have to prove an extraordinary, truly compelling reason and show there was absolutely no other way to accomplish their goal. That's an incredibly high bar, and for good reason. Discrimination is almost never necessary to serve the public.

By embedding equality directly into our constitution, the ERA would give communities across our state a powerful tool to push back against government overreach and ensure that freedom and fairness belong to all of us, not just a few.

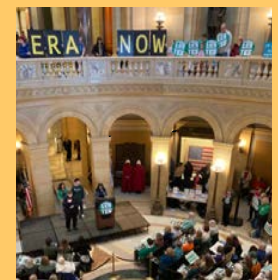
Standing Up for Who We Are

The ERA is a chance for Minnesotans to be clear about who we are — and who we refuse to become.

While a state amendment cannot single-handedly stop federal ICE agents or override federal immigration law, its power lies in defining the limits of our own state government. The ERA would ensure that Minnesota's own resources, law enforcement, and agencies cannot be weaponized against our people — creating a legal "no-go zone" for state participation in authoritarianism.

Rally for the ERA

On March 10, hundreds of Minnesotans gathered at the Capitol to rally for equal rights for all. From student organizers, to legislative leaders, advocates shared how the ERA can meet this moment and send a powerful message about our state's values.



**MINNESOTANS
FOR EQUAL RIGHTS**

Deepening Our Roots in North Dakota

As we deepen our work in North Dakota, we're modeling the future we want to help build — one where North Dakotans and their belief in fairness and freedom take the lead in shaping their state. That includes welcoming a new full-time North Dakota based staff member, Charlie Williamson!

Get to Know: Charlie Williamson

North Dakota Program Manager, they/theirs

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and what drew you to Gender Justice?

I'm an extroverted theatre kid, turned teacher, turned event planner, but community organizing has always been my happy place. When I chose to make my home in Fargo-Moorhead after college, I dove into the vibrant LGBTQ+ organizing scene. Discovering Gender Justice soon after was an "aha" moment: I love how we work on intersecting gender equity issues like reproductive rights and trans rights. And I love that we're fighting in North Dakota — a place progressive movements sometimes dismiss as impossible, even though North Dakotans know better.



What makes this moment in North Dakota important? And what role do you see Gender Justice playing?

The state legislature has pushed through a near-total abortion ban and stripped trans youth of access to gender-affirming health care — betraying North Dakotan values of privacy and freedom while ignoring our actual priorities, like strong schools and economic opportunity. We're fed up and ready to push back.

But without robust organizing infrastructure and resources — which our opponents have in spades — it can be hard to build lasting momentum. That's where Gender Justice comes in. There are so many energized organizations and advocates here, and I'm excited to see us bringing legal, policy, and narrative tools to support the movement.

What are you most looking forward to in the work ahead?

One thing we face across North Dakota is rampant misinformation. Challenging it is incredibly rewarding. I'm creating custom curricula for our Trans Equity Trainings — supporting churches wanting to stand up for trans equity, LGBTQ+ organizations examining their own bias, and health care workers who want to support their patients. I'll go anywhere and talk to anyone, because a lack of information fuels fear that can transform into hate threatening trans people's dignity and safety.

What are your hopes for this work in the short and long term?

In the next year, I want Gender Justice to be a trusted resource — an organization folks know they can turn to for collaboration, information, and hands-on training. In five years, I want to see the work we're investing in today, from the People's Session to legal advocacy to Trans Equity Trainings, translate into durable policy wins that improve everyday North Dakotans' lives. And in ten years, I want to live in a North Dakota where celebration of trans and LGBTQ+ people is built into our culture and laws, bodily autonomy is unquestioned, and everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive.



Policy by the People, for the People

On April 25, we're collaborating with North Dakota partners to host the second-annual People's Session in Bismarck. Ahead of the 2027 North Dakota Legislative Session, everyday North Dakotans will come together at this grassroots gathering to collaborate on a people-first legislative vision — and build skills to turn that agenda into action.



Meet Our New Board Chair, Prairie Rose Seminole

she/hers and they/theirs

An enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara (MHA) Nation of North Dakota, Prairie Rose is a dedicated advocate for Indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and storytelling. She has served on the Gender Justice Board since 2024 and this year, they're stepping into the role of Gender Justice Board Chair.

"My people lived here long before borders were drawn. My ancestor, Dakota Chief PahTanka, and 25 families in his band were forcibly removed from the lands they called home in what is now Minnesota and pushed into the Dakotas. Both Minnesota and North Dakota hold the stories of my blood, my lineage, and my people. I see my role with Gender Justice as more than an opportunity to stand with communities in both states and their fight for a fair and just future — it's an act of honoring those who came before me and all they endured, and a reminder of the deep connections that cannot be erased by displacement or time."



I Heart Progress Day

In February, Gender Justice joined fellow North Dakota advocacy organizations at a Fargo celebration for I Heart Progress Day — an annual event uplifting North Dakotan progressive organizing leaders!



Fighting for Bodily Autonomy and Defending Against Discrimination

AT THE MINNESOTA CAPITOL

This legislative session, Gender Justice is working on two fronts:

1. We are working to advance policies that expand freedom and gender equity — including the Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would embed equality directly into our state Constitution and expand protections for reproductive freedom so every Minnesotan can make their own decisions about their bodies, families, and futures.

2. At the same time, we're facing a coordinated wave of attacks. Lawmakers have introduced more than 40 bills targeting transgender people. These bills are designed to erase trans people from public life and dismantle protections we've spent decades securing.

If passed, they would roll back our state's longstanding nondiscrimination protections, ban trans students from participating in school sports, block updates to birth certificates, mandate discrimination against incarcerated trans people, ban gender-affirming health care for youth, and censor educators from teaching about gender identity while forcing schools to out students to their parents.

We refuse to go backward. We're working at the Capitol every day to advance policies that protect and expand freedom and defend our communities, and stop these dangerous attacks before they become law.

Minnesota has always been a state that looks out for its own. Help us keep it that way. Contact your legislators, speak out in your communities, and stay engaged. Together, we can protect the progress we've made and build a Minnesota where everyone belongs and can thrive.



Sign up for
Legislative
Action Alerts



I SAY GENDER, YOU SAY JUSTICE!

Thank you to our speakers, sponsors, and attendees who celebrated with us last fall at our third annual — and most successful — Gender Justice Brunch EVER!

Together, we laughed, we learned, and we leveraged our collective power, raising over \$125,000 to support our work.

We kicked off the morning with our unforgettable queerleaders Randy Dandy, Sparkles DuJour, and Paige Turner, complete with pom poms and the Gender Justice wave!

The CLE-eligible panel, moderated by Gender Justice Legal Director Jess Braverman, included WNBA veteran and first out trans and non-binary league player, Layshia Clarendon, and Inclusion Playbook founder and president, Ashland Johnson.

Together, the three shared an incredible conversation on why trans inclusion in sports isn't just a matter of equity — it also creates a foundational opportunity for our youth to find belonging and sets in motion lifelong patterns of connection and teamwork.

Speaking on how their life in sports has contributed to the advocacy work they do now, Layshia shared:

“Sports have always been a microcosm for larger society. Particularly in the US, there’s a deep history of sport connected to civil rights. From John Carlos to Billie Jean King, fast forward to the NWSL and the fight for equal pay, sport is that microcosm for culture and what’s happening... it can change people’s minds and hearts.”

We're already planning this fall's event and can't wait to share more soon!



To support Gender Justice's work in the meantime, consider one of the following ways to make a gift:

- Monthly gifts help us to forecast and plan for the fight ahead.
- Gifts through your IRA, donor-advised funds, and stock can be beneficial to both Gender Justice and you.
- Hosting an event to benefit Gender Justice introduces our work to broader networks and new supporters.

Contact our development team today!

Director of Development:

Anne Page, anne.page@genderjustice.us

General inquiries: development@genderjustice.us



GENDER JUSTICE BRUNCH





ADVANCING GENDER EQUITY THROUGH THE LAW

Nonprofit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Twin Cities, MN
Permit # 7382

663 University Avenue W, Suite 200
Saint Paul, MN 55104
651.789.2090
Email: info@genderjustice.us

www.genderjustice.us
@genderjustice

Staff

MEGAN PETERSON, Executive Director, she/hers
ERIN MAYE QUADE, Senior Advisor, she/hers
JESS BRAVERMAN, Legal Director, all pronouns
SARA JANE BALDWIN, Senior Staff Attorney, she/hers
GRETA WIESSNER, Senior Staff Attorney, she/hers
SAM NAGLER, Equal Justice Works Fellow, she/hers
MCKINNA HODGE, Legal Assistant / Paralegal, she/hers
MONICA MEYER, Political Director, she/hers and they/theirs
GRACE REARDON, Advocacy & Engagement Manager, she/hers
CHARLIE WILLIAMSON, North Dakota Program Manager, they/
theirs
NOAH PARRISH, Communications Director, he/his
SIENA IWASAKI MILBAUER, Communications Manager, she/hers
ANNE PAGE, Development Director, she/hers
SARA HILDRETH, Development Manager, she/hers
PAOLA LÓPEZ-CORTÉS, Executive Coordinator & Board Liaison,
she/hers
ALISSA LIGHT, Senior Advisor, Minnesotans for Equal Rights
Campaign, she/hers

Board of Directors

GENDER JUSTICE

PRAIRIE ROSE SEMINOLE, Chair, she/hers and they/theirs
DEE SENARATNA, Vice Chair, she/hers
MICHAEL ANDERSON, Treasurer, he/his
THOMAS FIEBIGER, Secretary, he/his
CB BAGA, they/theirs
AMANDA BARTSCHENFELD, she/hers
CIERRA BUCKNER, she/hers
ELINA CASTILLO JIMÉNEZ, she/hers
AL GERHARDSTEIN, he/his
JESSICA HEISER, she/hers
ALISON KELLY, she/hers
NICOLE MOEN, she/hers
CHRIS MOSIER, he/his
RILEY PALMER, she/hers
DIVYA RAMAN, she/hers
JONI THOME, she/hers
ANN TOBIN, she/hers

GENDER JUSTICE ACTION

HETAL DALAL, Chair, she/hers
ELIZABETH GLIDDEN, Treasurer, she/hers
CLARA RIES, Secretary, she/hers
MADDIE HARVALA, she/hers
MARS KAMENSKI, they/theirs and he/his
ERICA MAUTER, she/hers
WINTANA MELEKIN, she/hers
CHELSEA SHELDON, she/hers