CEW report outlines potential impact of Michigan ballot proposal to end affirmative action

ANN ARBOR, Mich.—A proposed amendment to the state Constitution that would ban affirmative action likely would have a broad impact in Michigan if it is approved by the voters in November, according to a study released today (June 26) by the Center for the Education of Women (CEW) at the University of Michigan. The impact can be expected to be felt in employment, contracting, education—including both K-12 and higher education, job training, and outreach initiatives throughout the public sector.

The proposed amendment, called the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, seeks to ban programs that give consideration to groups or individuals based upon their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes. Public institutions that would be affected by the proposal include state government, county and municipal governments, public colleges and universities, community colleges and K-12 school districts.

The MCRI is modeled after Proposition 209, a nearly identical constitutional amendment adopted by California voters in 1996. Both amendments were sponsored by former University of California regent Ward Connerly.

The study, authored by CEW Associate Director Susan Kaufmann, draws on data regarding employment, contracting, and education since passage of Prop. 209 in California to predict the ballot proposal’s potential impact in Michigan. An earlier CEW study focused on the potential impact of the ballot proposal on women and girls. Both reports are available online at www.cew.umich.edu.

“California experience suggests that the impact of the initiative can be expected to be quite broad, affecting not only affirmative action but also outreach efforts designed to ensure access to opportunity,” the author writes. California courts consistently have construed Prop. 209 broadly, the report notes.

The study also found that the California amendment led to significant decreases in government contracts awarded to minority- and women-owned businesses, hiring of minority and female professors in the state-wide University of California system, and enrollment of minority students in the University of California system. Programs challenged after the passage of Prop 209 included pre-college outreach and preparation for low-income and minority students; outreach and funding for women and minority math, science and technology teachers; programs helping minorities and women become apprentices in the skilled trades; and diversity efforts in appointments made by the governor to corrections and parole boards.
The CEW report projects similar results in Michigan if the amendment is adopted, including ongoing legal challenges against the state, counties, municipalities and school districts.

The study predicts that, based on California’s experience, Michigan’s public colleges and universities likely would also experience drops in enrollment of underrepresented minority students that could “worsen over time, making it very difficult to maintain a student body that prepares students for life and work in the 21st century.” According to the report, this could result in “an accompanying decrease in diversity among … graduates who are sought for jobs by businesses in Michigan” and a “resulting decrease in the number of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals willing to serve the state’s and nation’s underserved communities, with serious implications for health status and leadership development in communities of color.”

The CEW report highlights the importance of diversity in education and employment, citing research showing that students of all races who live and learn among diverse peers become more original and critical thinkers, develop greater tolerance for differences and become effective employees in the global marketplace.

According to the CEW report, the California experience suggests that state-funded outreach to encourage minority and female students to pursue math, science, and technology careers likely would be eliminated or amended, as would financial aid and scholarships that take gender, race, ethnicity, or national origin into account.

Other likely outcomes suggested by the California experience include diminished access by minority- and women-owed businesses to government contracts, and drops in hiring of faculty of color and women faculty in the state’s public universities.

The report notes that in Michigan, pervasive racial segregation in schools and neighborhoods is a major factor in low educational attainment, poverty and out-migration. Michigan ranks 31st in the country for the percentage of residents 25 years and over who have attained a four-year college degree. The CEW study draws on recent reports about Michigan’s economic challenges to note that “resolving Michigan’s economic crisis demand(s) that all citizens be educated to the full extent of their interests and abilities, especially in science and technical fields.”

The Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan is nationally recognized for its unique three-fold mission: service, research and advocacy. CEW provides counseling and educational programs to women and men regarding academic, career and life issues; conducts social research on policy and gender issues; and advocates for improved policy and practice.

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