

The Center for the Education of Women  
University of Michigan

## Potential Gender Impact of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative

Research Brief  
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### Likely Results of Passage:

- The ballot initiative is a proposed amendment to the state constitution. It does not appear to grant any additional civil rights. It is based on Proposition 209, a similar amendment passed in California in 1996, and could be interpreted similarly. It would generally prohibit consideration of race, gender, ethnicity and national origin in public education, public employment and government contracting at all levels of state and local government, including public schools.
- It would not only eliminate affirmative action programs designed to increase fair and equal access to opportunity for historically under-represented groups such as women and people of color, it is also likely (if interpreted consistently with Proposition 209) to lead to the elimination of outreach programs like those that encourage girls to study science and math or men to become nurses or elementary teachers.
- The similar California amendment led to:
  - hiring of fewer women faculty and faculty of color at public universities in that state
  - a drop in the percentage of women working in the skilled trades
  - decreases in government contracts awarded to women- and minority-owned businesses
  - fewer women and students of color enrolling and graduating in technical fields, including computer science—a field in which women’s participation was already very low.
- In California, the amendment was used as the basis for challenges to funding for domestic violence programs and other state-supported services specifically designed to address women’s needs, including breast cancer screening. The lawsuits were unsuccessful for technical reasons, but the question of whether such programs could be considered illegal under the amendment remains open.

### Probable Impact on Michigan’s Economy:

- Because women’s wages tend to be lower, education is particularly important for women. A woman with a college degree earns only a little more than a man with a high school degree. Without a college degree, she earns far less.

- A Michigan woman working full-time, year-round earns 67 cents for every dollar earned by a man working the same hours. Michigan has about the biggest gap in the country between men's and women's wages—we're ranked #49. Most families rely on women's wages to maintain their standard of living.
- Based on experience in California, this ballot initiative seems likely to hurt efforts to improve the state economy. Michigan lags behind much of the country in the percentage of citizens with a college education. In order to compete globally, we need to educate as many of our citizens as possible. The ballot initiative would probably have the effect of shutting down many programs that increase educational access and opportunity.
- Michigan and the nation face an acute shortage of scientists, which will get worse soon as many Baby Boomers retire. Research suggests that if we do not train more women and people of color as scientists and engineers, we will not have enough to meet our scientific and technological needs, and our economy will not successfully change and grow.

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*A full discussion of the gender impact of the Michigan Civil Rights initiative is available at <http://www.cew.umich.edu/research/resreps.htm>.*

*This Research Brief is based on "The Gender Impact of the Proposed Civil Rights Initiative", revised January 2006. Susan W. Kaufmann and Anne K. Davis, Ann Arbor, MI: The Center for the Education of Women, University of Michigan, 2006.*