

Mary Ellen Verheyden-Hilliard, nonprofit founder, advocate

Mary Ellen Verheyden-Hilliard, 89, who led a national program to enforce Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and was the founder of the Equity Institute, a Bethesda, Md., educational equity nonprofit, died April 29 at hospice center in Alexandria, Va. The cause of death was congestive heart failure, said a daughter, Mara Verheyden-Hilliard.

Ms. Verheyden-Hilliard was born Mary Ellen Verheyden in Webster Groves, Mo. She was a concert pianist and performed as a soloist with the St. Louis Philharmonic at 13. She lived and acted in New York City before settling in Washington in 1964.

From 1974 to 1976, she led The Sex Equality in Guidance Opportunities Project, a national federal training program that provided workshops and educational programming related to Title IX, a federal law prohibiting discrimination in education.

Soon after, she established the Equity Institute and developed the American Women in Science series, a set of biographies highlighting accomplished female scientists. She served on the D.C. Commission for Women and was the first national coordinator of the National Organization for Women's Education Task Force.