

*Connecticut Women's  
Centennial Suffrage  
Commission's*  
Fifty Years  
of Women  
Candidates

100  
1920-2020

**WOMEN VOTE**

Connecticut Suffrage Centennial



Denise W. Merrill  
Connecticut Secretary of the State

2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment which extended voting rights to women resulting in the largest single expansion of democracy in our nation's history. The road to universal voting rights has been a crooked path. Some women, mainly in western states, already had the right to vote before the ratification of the 19th Amendment, while some states allowed women limited voting rights for Board of Education candidates but not for other offices.

Women's suffrage is something of a misnomer at this time, of course, because women of color were still disenfranchised by racist policies, Jim Crow laws, poll taxes, literacy tests, and other barriers. But the ratification of the 19th Amendment was evidence that voting rights could be won through grassroots struggle, and from that point forward the story of America is one of ever-expanding democracy. In 1924 Native Americans were granted citizenship and Asian American immigrants were not able to become citizens until 1943, but the right to vote was determined at the state level. It wasn't until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 that African Americans and other racial minorities were finally and fully enfranchised. The ratification of the 26th Amendment in 1971 then expanded the franchise by lowering the voting age to 18.

As we celebrate the centennial of the Amendment and examine its history and legacy, it is important to take a step back and see how the passage of the 19th Amendment has affected the representation of women in office. This report is the result of that investigation.

Electing more women to office, irrespective of party affiliation, has always been important to me. Throughout my own career in public service I have recruited women to run, mentored them, and even served as co-chair of the Women's Campaign School at Yale in its early years. So why is it so hard? Why is it that women are more than half the population, and yet we are so far away from realizing the goal of equal representation? There is no easy answer. The answers are a mix of social norms, political traditions,

power structures, and the strength or weaknesses of any individual candidate. One thing we know for certain: we will never have an equal number of women in office if they aren't running for office.

It is well documented that women, to a much greater extent than men, need to be recruited before they throw their hats in to the ring and become political candidates. If you want to see more women in office, then go ask them to run. Encourage them and keep encouraging them.

Women often need to be reminded that there is only one essential qualification to run for office: the desire to make a difference. Too often women don't see themselves as qualified enough, or they assume that some other office is a prerequisite and that's simply not the case.

Not surprisingly, candidates who lose early in their political career are disinclined to run again, but the gap is larger for women. To those women who have run but lost their race I would say this: please consider running again. I have been an elected official for more than a quarter century, and I've won three statewide elections, but I lost my first race. I didn't give up and neither should you.

Finally, women are more likely to run for office when they see other women run for office, and girls are more likely to aspire to public service when they see women holding public office. As this report makes clear we have come a long way in the last one hundred years, and it makes just as clear that we have farther yet to go. So to any women or girls who are reading this, please consider this the first ask of many – please run, we need your voice in the conversation.

Thank you,



Denise W. Merrill  
Connecticut Secretary of the State

## **AMENDMENT XIX:**

*The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.*



**Sara B. Crawford** (R) of Westport was the first female Secretary of the State of Connecticut from 1939-1941. She was a member of the Connecticut State House of Representatives from 1925-1927 and 1931-1937 and spent four terms on the Appropriations Committee. Outside of the Connecticut General Assembly, she was the president of the Westport Republican Women's club for 8 years and served as vice-chairman of the Republican Town Committee for 12 years.



# CONNECTICUT

VOTES  
FOR  
WOMEN

Connecticut Women's Centennial Suffrage Commission's  
**FIFTY YEARS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES**

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# SUMMARY

This report analyzes the activity of women candidates for General Assembly, statewide, and federal offices since 1970 and is being released as part of the Secretary of the State's recognition of the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. After the completion of the 2020 election cycle, the report will be supplemented with that data set to reflect a full 50-year period.

The number of women candidates running for office in Connecticut has risen steadily for the last 50 years. Although the number of women candidates has increased, in 2018 only 35% of candidates were women, even though women make up slightly more than half of Connecticut's population.

When women run for office, women win at the same rate as men, and as the number of women candidates has increased, the success of women candidates has increased.

The result of these trends is that the 62<sup>1</sup> women currently serving in the Connecticut General Assembly is the largest number of women to serve in the CGA in history. The first woman elected to the Connecticut Senate was elected in 1924 and the first four women elected to the Connecticut House were elected in 1920. For the past two decades, the percentage of women in the House has remained at roughly 30% and the percentage of women in the Senate at roughly 25%.

The situation in statewide and federal offices lags behind the state legislature. In the hundred years since the passage of the 19th Amendment only 13% of those offices have been held by women in Connecticut. Aside from Secretary of the State, to which a woman was first elected in 1938 and which has mostly been held by women in recent years, no other statewide or federal office was held by a woman until 1974.

Nationally, the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics ranks Connecticut 16th in the number of women elected to office, with one-third of the state legislature made up of women, compared to one-quarter nationally.

The focus of the report is specific to gender and does not attempt to consider the power of incumbency or how race intersects with women's representation in elected office. It also does not consider money in politics, whether female candidates have similar experiences raising money as male candidates, or how public campaign financing has affected the representation of women in public office in Connecticut.

This report analyzes 48 years of elections. In the future, it will be updated with the 2020 election and beyond. There is also a clear need for more detailed demographic information about candidates to create a similar report focused on race, as well as to examine how race and gender intersect. Finally, because it is often true that women feel they must have held a local office before they run for a state office, a study of women among local elected officials and candidates to understand the success of pipeline to state and federal campaigns and office is necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Pending results of the 2020 special elections

# NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES:

For nearly half a century, the number of women candidates has been steadily increasing. In the 1970's an average of 65 women competed in state and federal elections each two-year cycle. Since 2000, roughly 100 women have run each election cycle, and in 2018 Connecticut had a record-breaking 138 women candidates for state and federal office. However, that is still only 35% of the 392 candidates on that year's ballot. If we are to achieve equal representation of women in office, it is critical to increase the number of women on the ballot.

It is a mistake to assume that the underrepresentation of women in office is because they are not interested in politics or public service, or because they lack ambition. On the contrary, women begin their journey to electoral politics differently than men do. Here's a few examples:

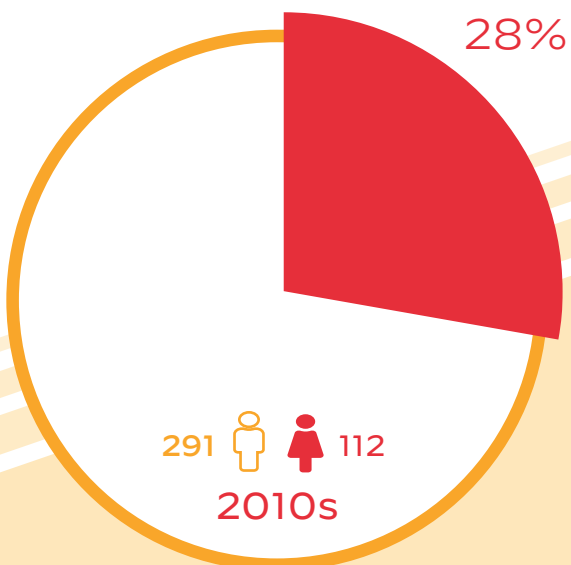
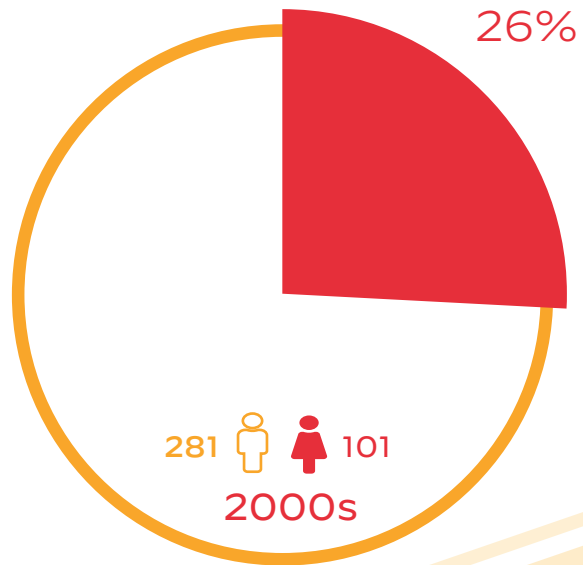
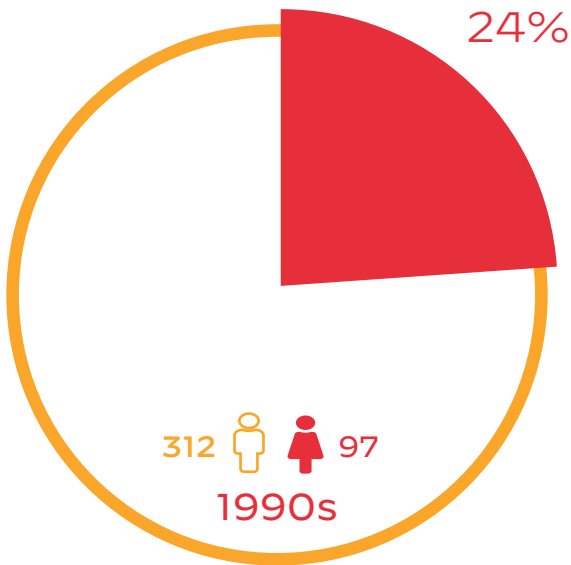
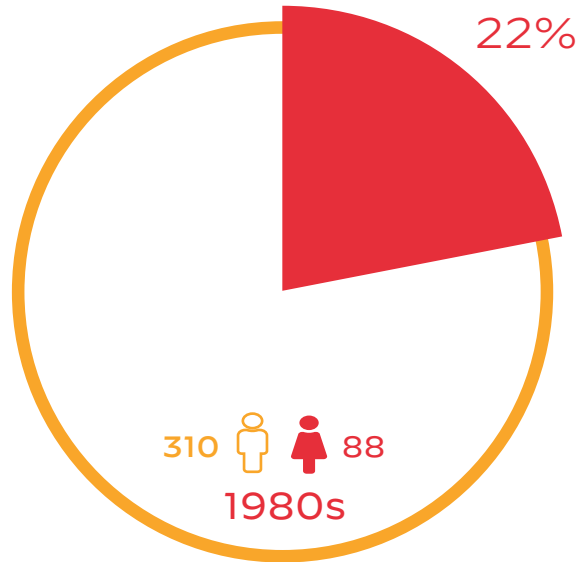
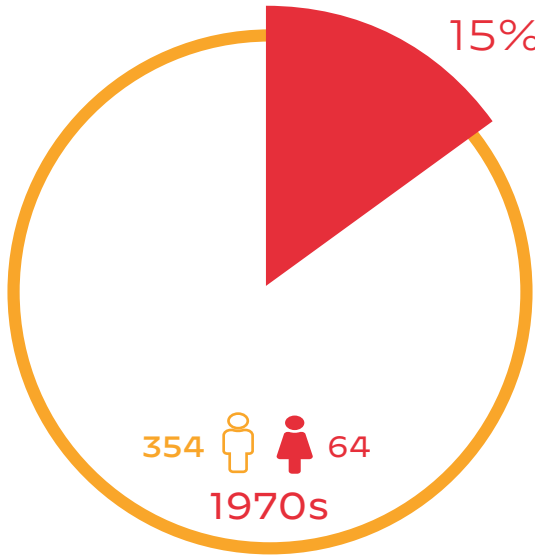
Men are more likely to promote themselves as potential candidate, and women more likely to wait until they are asked to run. In fact, some studies show that women need to be asked, on average, seven times, and twice that many times for women of color.

Women often assume that they are not qualified and pursue local offices before they run for state or federal offices. This can slow their path to higher office.

A competitive campaign requires a significant investment of time in order to win, and even more time if they do win. The fact that women are still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks makes it difficult for them to believe that they have the necessary time to devote to campaigning or public service once elected.

*The number of women candidates  
has been steadily increasing  
for close to fifty years*

# Women as a % of all candidates:



**Ella T. Grasso** (D) of Windsor Locks was the first female Governor of Connecticut (1975-1980) and the first woman to be elected governor in the United States in her own right. Grasso had a long career in politics starting in 1952 when she was elected to the General Assembly. She served as Secretary of the State from 1958-1970 and in Congress from 1970-1974. She remains the only woman to be honored with a statute on the outside of the State Capitol Building.

# WOMEN % SUCCESS:

When women run, they are just as likely to win as their male counterparts. In fact, as increasing numbers of women run, they have greater success.

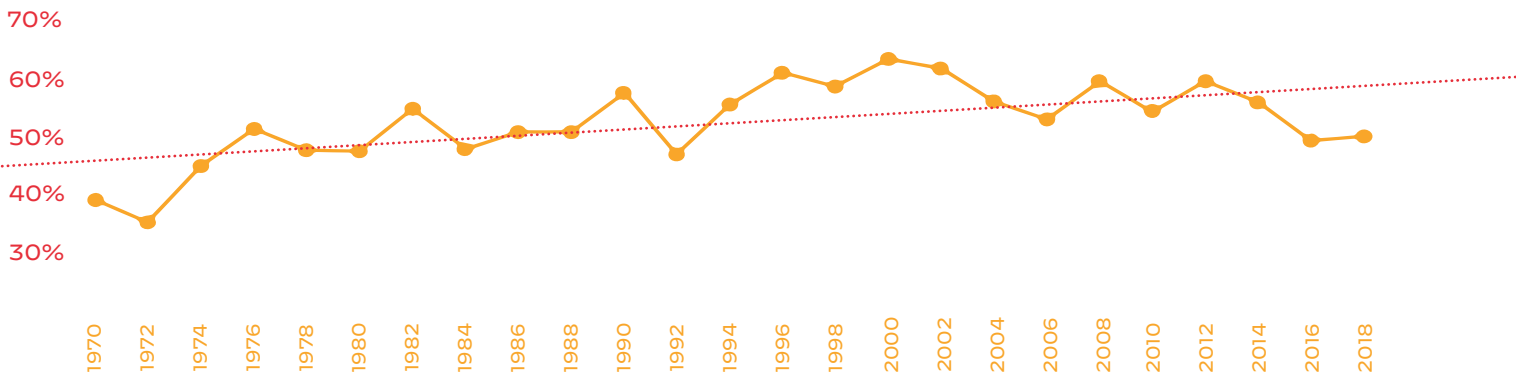
In the 1970's, Connecticut women won their races 44% of the time. In the first decade of this century, they had a 58% success rate, which is the highest among the 5 decades reviewed.

Even today women candidates will need to navigate some gender stereotypes, some of which might even be beneficial. For example, the underrepresentation of women in elected office may lead to women candidates being perceived as "outsiders" or "change agents". Conversely, because they are underrepresented in elected office they may face questions about electability, but the evidence is clear that voters are ready and willing to support women just as they would a male candidate.

Of course, many factors contribute to success including the quality of the campaign, partisan leanings of the district, incumbency vs open seat, etc. Nonetheless, the success rate of women candidates does indicate that when women run, they have an equal chance of success, and if we are to achieve equal representation in elected office we need to have more women candidates.

The Rate of Success for Women Candidates for Connecticut General Assembly, Statewide Offices, and Federal Offices Since 1970

## Women Wins over Women Runs (%)



**Moira Lyons** (D) of Stamford was the first woman elected to serve as Majority Leader and Speaker of the House in Connecticut, as well as one of two people to ever hold three terms as Speaker. She was elected to the General Assembly in 1980 and served as Speaker of the House from 1999-2004. While in office she served as co-chairwoman of the Transportation Committee and later pushed legislation to create the Transportation Strategy Board. She was also committed to backing legislation relating to early childhood initiatives.



*When women, run, they are just as likely to win as male candidates, and as increasing numbers of women run, they have better success*

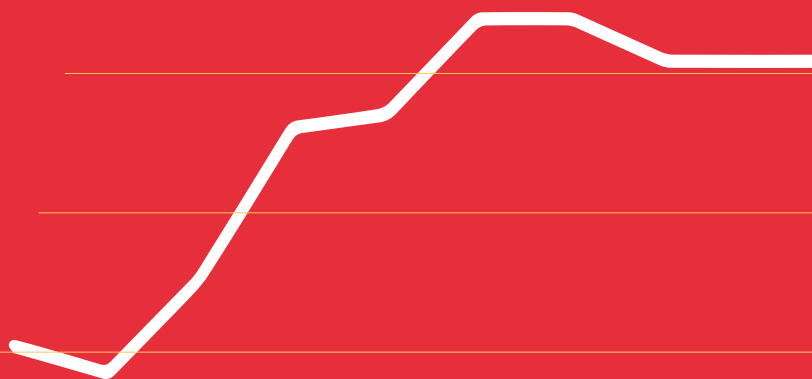
Success of Women Candidates Running for Connecticut General Assembly, Statewide Offices, and Federal Offices Since 1970



# WOMEN OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1970 1972 1974 1976 1978 1980 1982 1984 1986

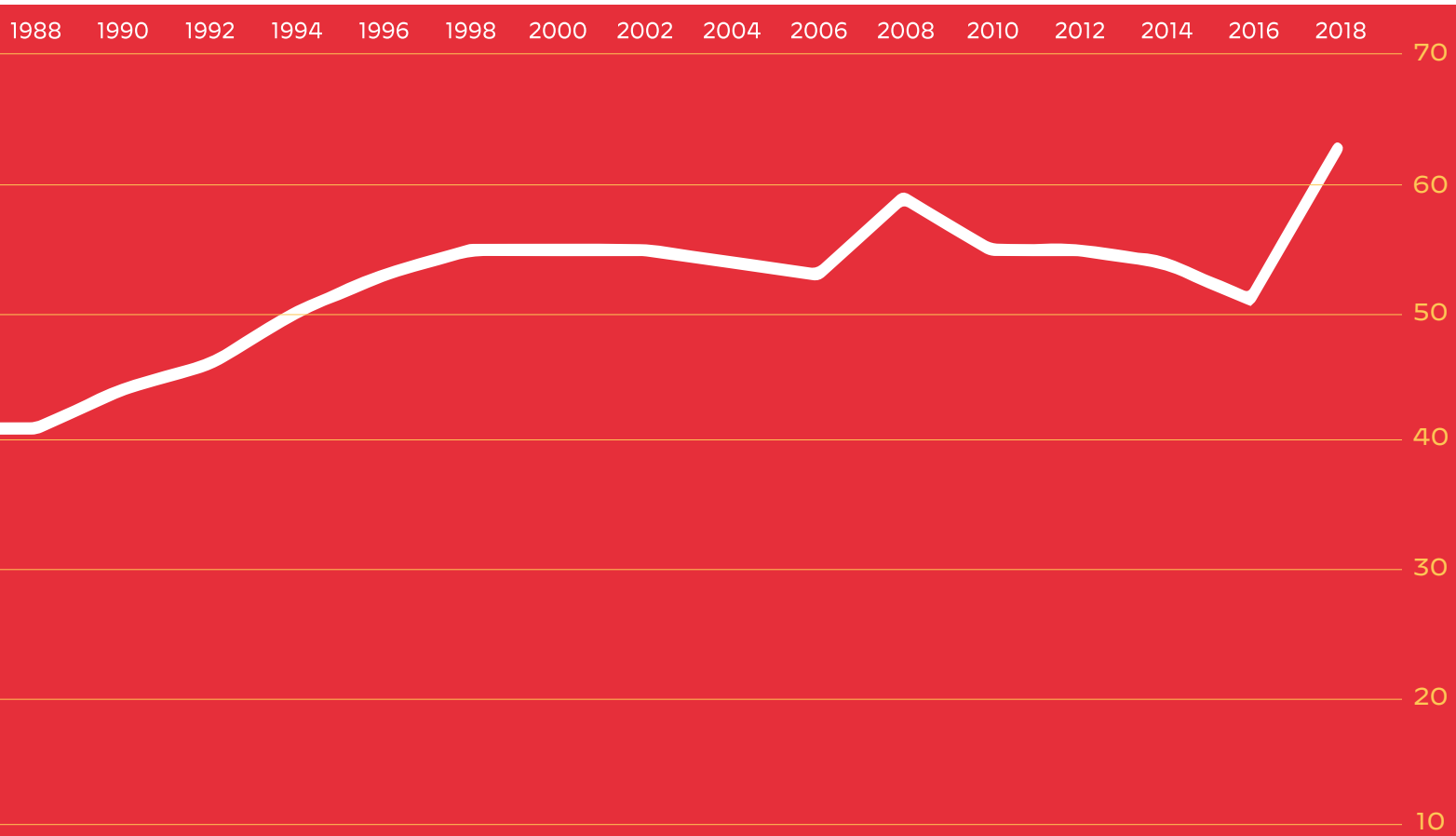
*There are more  
women serving in  
the Connecticut  
General Assembly  
today than at  
any other time in  
history*



Of the 187 seats in the General Assembly 62<sup>1</sup> are currently held by women,, which is more than at any other time in history. The second highest peak was in 2008 when there were 59 women. Taken as a whole 48 year time period, the Democrats and Republicans average 25% female membership within each of their respective caucuses.

<sup>1</sup> Pending results of the 2020 special elections

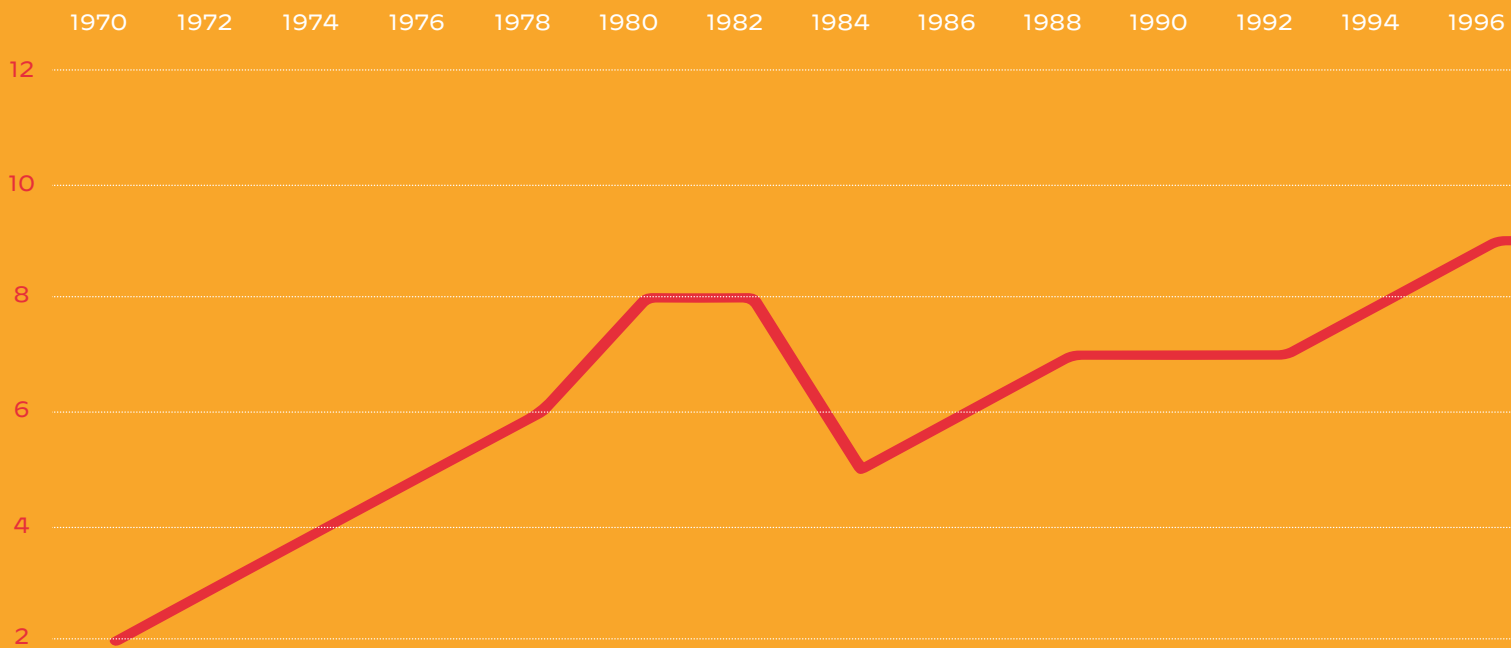
## Number of Women in Connecticut General Assembly, 1970–2018



**Lillian S. Frink** (R) of Canterbury was one of the five first women elected to the state House of Representatives in 1921. She served in the House of Representatives five times, two terms in the 1920s and three terms in the 1950s. She was a member of the Republican State Central Committee as well as a Town Clerk of Canterbury for 25 years.

**Grace I. Edwards** (I) of New Hartford was one of the five first women elected to the state House of Representatives in 1921. She was nominated to run for state legislature immediately following the passage of the 19th Amendment.

**Helen A. Jewett** (D) of Tolland was one of the five first women elected to the state House of Representatives in 1921 and the only Democrat. She later served for 35 years on the Tolland Board of Education and held leadership roles in several community organizations. She was the first female lawmaker to have the title Reverend in front of her name.



## Number of Women in Connecticut State Senate

# WOMEN OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY: The Senate

The senate elected its first woman member in 1924 when Alice Merritt, Republican of Hartford was elected to represent the Second District. Nearly 100 years later, in 2018, a record number of 11 women were elected to the State Senate. Until then there had never been more than 9. However, that victory was short lived when two of those women accepted gubernatorial appointments and the subsequent special elections included no women candidates.

The number of women in the State Senate has hovered at 25% for roughly twenty five years.

There have been only two women to lead the State Senate, both of whom were Republicans. The first was Florence Finney of Greenwich. In 1973 Lt. Governor T. Clark Hull was given a judicial appointment, Senator Peter Cashman who had been Senate President Pro Tempore ascended to become Lt. Governor, and Senator Florence Finney then became Senate President Pro Tempore (1973-1974). Twenty years later, M. Adela “Dell” Eads of Kent served as Senate President Pro Tempore in the 1995-1997 term.

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018



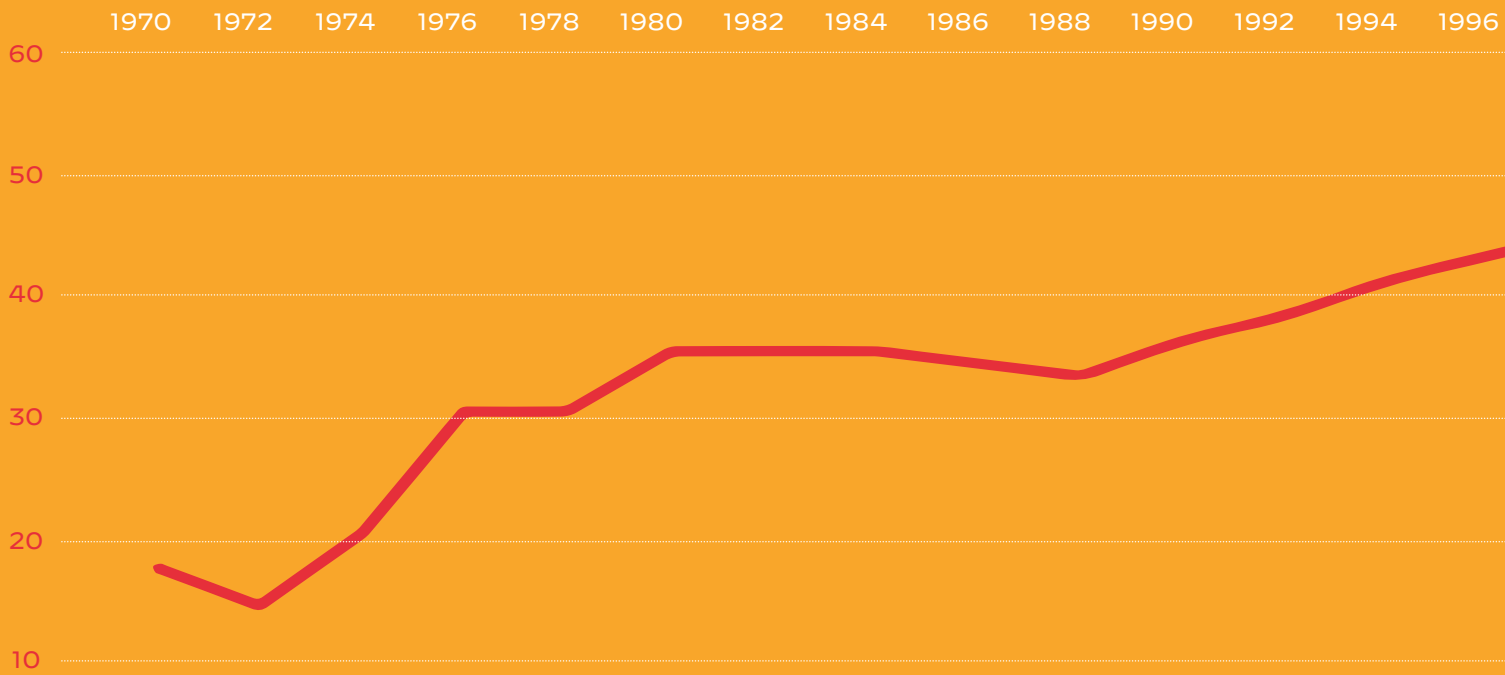
**Florence D. Finney** (R) of Greenwich was the first woman elected as President Pro Tempore of the State Senate (1973-1974) after Senator Cashman ascended to become Lt. Governor. She was first elected to the House in 1949 and then the State Senate in 1955 and was known throughout her career as an advocate for children, the sick, and the elderly.



**Margaret Morton** (D) of Bridgeport was the first African American woman elected to the Connecticut General Assembly. She served in the House of Representatives (1972-1980) and then State Senate (1980-1992). She chaired the committee on Human Rights and Opportunities and was a champion for causes to help impoverished people in urban areas. She was the highest-ranking black woman in legislative history as Deputy President Pro Tempore upon her retirement in 1992.



**Beth Bye** (D) of West Hartford was the first openly lesbian legislator in the Connecticut General Assembly. She served in the House of Representatives from 2007-2011 and the State Senate from 2011-2019. During her service she led the Appropriations Committee and the Higher Education Committee. An early childhood professional, Bye served on the West Hartford Board of Education before running for state office and left the Senate upon appointment to lead the Office of Early Childhood.



## Number of Women in Connecticut House of Representatives



**Emily Sophie Brown** (R) of Naugatuck served in the General Assembly from 1921-1923, one of the first female legislators in the state. She was also a founding Board Member of the Naugatuck Chamber of Commerce and served on the Naugatuck Board of Education. She died at age 103 in 1985.

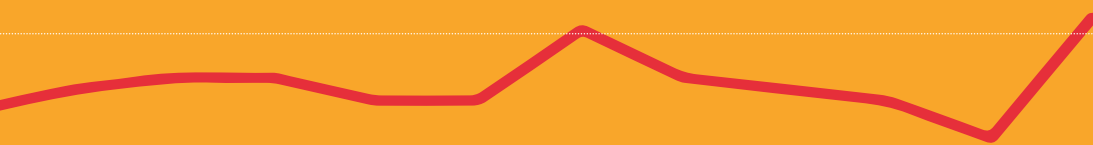


**Evelyn Mantilla** (D) of Hartford was not only the first openly bisexual legislator in the Connecticut General Assembly but also the first openly bisexual state official in the United States. Mantilla served in the House of Representatives from 1997 to 2007 and was the first Hispanic woman to become Deputy Majority Leader. She was a leading advocate for low-income families and civil rights.



**Themis Klarides** (R) of Derby began her public service on her local Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Finance, and today is one of the leading voices of Connecticut's Republican Party. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1998, Klarides rose to a leadership role within her caucus when she became Deputy Minority Leader in 2007. In 2014 she became the first female Republican Minority Leader in the House, a position she still currently holds. Prior to her service in state government she served on her local Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Finance.

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018



# WOMEN OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

## The House

The representation of women in the House has generally remained at about 30% for the last 20 years. Currently, there are 53<sup>1</sup> women in the House which is the most ever in our history and edging out the previous highpoint in 2008 by 2.

Women have been serving in the House of Representatives since the election of 1920. In the initial year of women's suffrage 34 women ran for office. Twenty-eight of those candidates were Democrats, 3 Republicans, and 1 each for the Socialists and Farm-Labor Party and 1 Independent. Five women were elected: Mary Hooker (R) of Hartford, Emily Sophie Brown (R) of Naugatuck, Lillian Frink (R) of Canterbury, Grace Edwards (I) of New Hartford, and Helen Jewett (D) of Tolland.

Today there has only been one woman to serve as Speaker of the House, Moira Lyons (D) from Stamford. Lyons was also the first woman to serve as House Majority Leader, and the only other woman to serve in that capacity was Representative Denise Merrill (D) of Mansfield. Representative Themis Klarides (R) of Derby is currently the only woman serving in a legislative leadership position. She is the first woman to lead the House Republican caucus and the first to serve as Minority Leader.

<sup>1</sup> Calculation based upon results of 2019 special elections

# STATEWIDE & FEDERAL OFFICES

Since the passage of the 19th Amendment, only 13% of Connecticut's statewide and federal offices have been held by women. In 1920, the Democrats nominated Fannie Dixon Welch to run for Secretary of the State. The Farm-Labor Party also nominated two women for statewide office, Elsie Hill for Secretary of the State and Josephine Bennett for U.S. Senate. Connecticut women have won races for most of those seats in the time period studied, but the US Senate has still never had a Connecticut woman as a member.

Sara Crawford (R) was elected Secretary of the State in 1938, making her the first woman elected statewide in Connecticut. In 1942, Clare Boothe Luce (R) became the first woman to represent Connecticut in Congress, followed by the election of Chase Going Woodhouse (D) in 1945. Despite these successes, 23 of the 30 women to serve in statewide or federal office did so within the last 50 years.

Although the office of the Secretary of the State has been a position held mostly by women in recent years, no other office had been held by a woman until the 1970s, starting with Ella Grasso's (D) gubernatorial election in 1974. Barbara Kennelly (D) and Nancy Johnson (R) joined the Congressional delegation in the 1982 and 1983, followed by the election of Rosa DeLauro (D) in 1991.

The first women to serve as Treasurer and Attorney General were appointed when those positions became vacant prior to the completion of the term. Clarine Nardi Riddle (D) was appointed Attorney General when Joe Lieberman vacated the post to become a US Senator. Joan Kemler (D) was appointed Treasurer to complete the term of Henry Parker when he resigned to take a position in private industry.

1990, Eunice Groark (ACP, R) of Hartford successfully ran for Lieutenant Governor as Lowell Weicker's running-mate, which made her the first woman to serve in that capacity. In 1998, fellow Hartford native, Denise Nappier (D) was elected Treasurer, making her the first African-American woman to serve in statewide office, as well as the first African-American woman elected Treasurer in the country. To date Nancy Wyman (D, Tolland) has been the only woman to serve as Comptroller.

■ Men and ■ Women in Statewide & Federal Office Since 1920







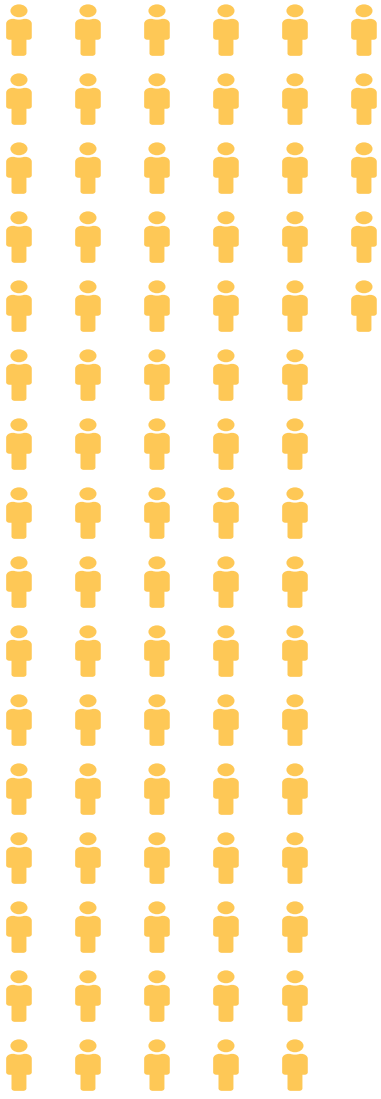
**Joan Kemler** (D) of West Hartford was the first woman to serve as State Treasurer (1986-1987). She was appointed to this position by Governor William O’Neill to complete the term of Henry Parke, who resigned to accept a position in the private sector. Prior to her appointment she served as a state representative from 1975-1984, including a position as Assistant Majority Leader from 1979-1984.



**Denise Nappier** (D) of Hartford was the first African American woman elected to statewide office, and the first African American woman elected as State Treasurer in the nation. While Joan Kemler was the first woman to serve as Treasurer, she was appointed to fill a vacancy, and so Nappier also holds the distinction of being the first woman elected to the role. As Treasurer Nappier advocated for better corporate governance and saved taxpayers billions of dollars. Prior to her election to statewide office she served as Hartford City Treasurer from 1989-1998.



**Clarine Nardi Riddle** (D) of New Haven served as Connecticut’s first and only female Attorney General from 1989-1991. She was appointed by Governor William O’Neill to fill the vacancy created by the election of Joseph Lieberman to the United States Senate. She became the first female Attorney General to argue in front of the Supreme Court of the United States.





**Eunice Groark** (A Connecticut Party) of Hartford was the first female Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut (1991-1995). She ran with Lowell P. Weicker, under the banner of newly created third party, A Connecticut Party. Groark cast the tie-breaking votes in favor of the income tax in 1991 and in favor of an assault weapon ban in 1993. In 1996, Groark ran with Audrey Rowe to form the first-ever all female ticket for governor and lieutenant governor.



**Nancy Wyman** (D) of Tolland was the first woman to serve as State Comptroller of Connecticut from 1995 to 2011. She went on to be elected as Lieutenant Governor of the state (2011-2019). Wyman's career is noted for her attention to consumer protection issues, most notably health care reform. She founded the 1995 working group that led to the HUSKY Health plan, and was integral in the state's successful policy implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

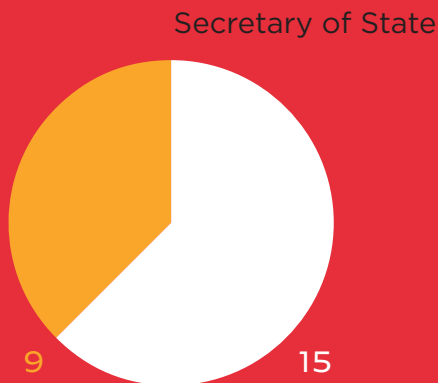
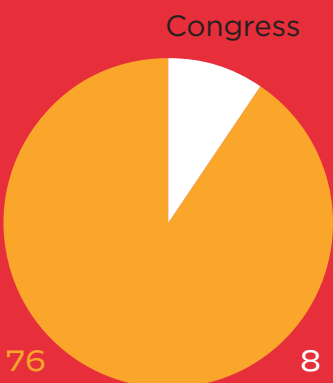
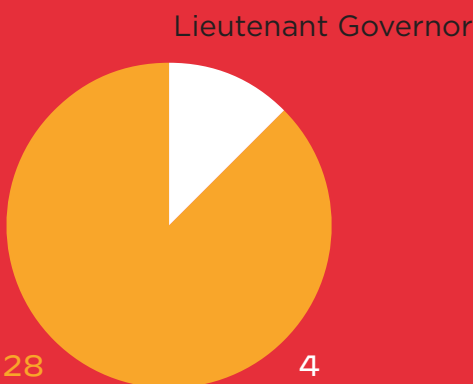
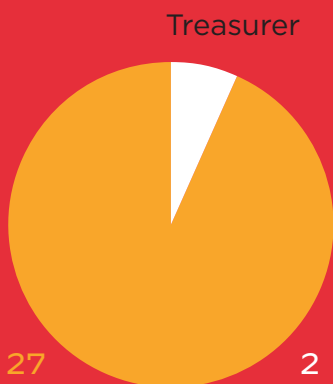
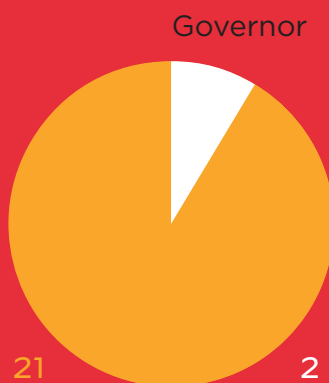
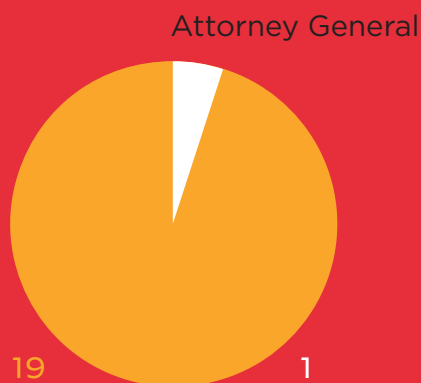
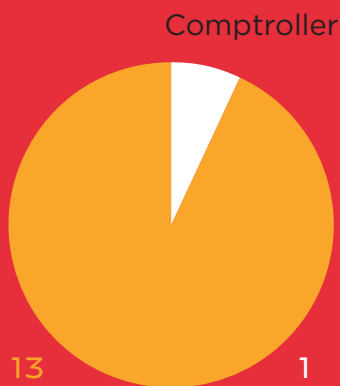
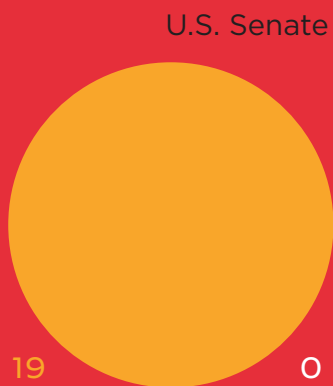


**Clare Boothe Luce** (R) of Ridgefield was the first woman elected to United States House of Representatives from Connecticut in 1942. She was appointed to the House Military Affairs Committee, and during her second term she created the Atomic Energy Commission. Following her time in the House she was appointed as the Ambassador to Italy, the first American woman to hold a diplomatic role of this kind.



**Jahana Hayes** (D) of Wolcott was the first African American woman to represent Connecticut in Congress, where she served on the Labor, Agriculture, and Education committees in her first term. Prior to her career in politics she had an accomplished career as a teacher, and in 2016 was awarded National Teacher of the Year.

*23 of the 30  
Connecticut  
women to serve  
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federal office have  
served in the last  
50 years*



Number of Women in Each  
Statewide and Federal  
Elected Office Since 1920

■ TOTAL # OF WOMEN WHO SERVED IN OFFICE  
■ TOTAL # OF MEN WHO SERVED IN OFFICE

# PARTISANSHIP

In the 1970's and early 1980's the Republican Party fielded more women candidates than the Democrats and had a higher rate of success in electing women. However, by the early 1990s Democrats began to demonstrate better recruitment of women candidates and the Republicans fell behind. In the 24 election cycles studied, the Democratic Party ran more women candidates 2/3 of the time.

The most women fielded by the Republicans was 49 in 1980, the beginning of the "Reagan Revolution", but the Republican's peak year for successful elections for women candidates was 1984 when they achieved a total of 29 victories. For Democratic candidates, the 2018 elections had a historic number of 75 women, but the most elected occurred in 2008 when there were 49 successfully elected.

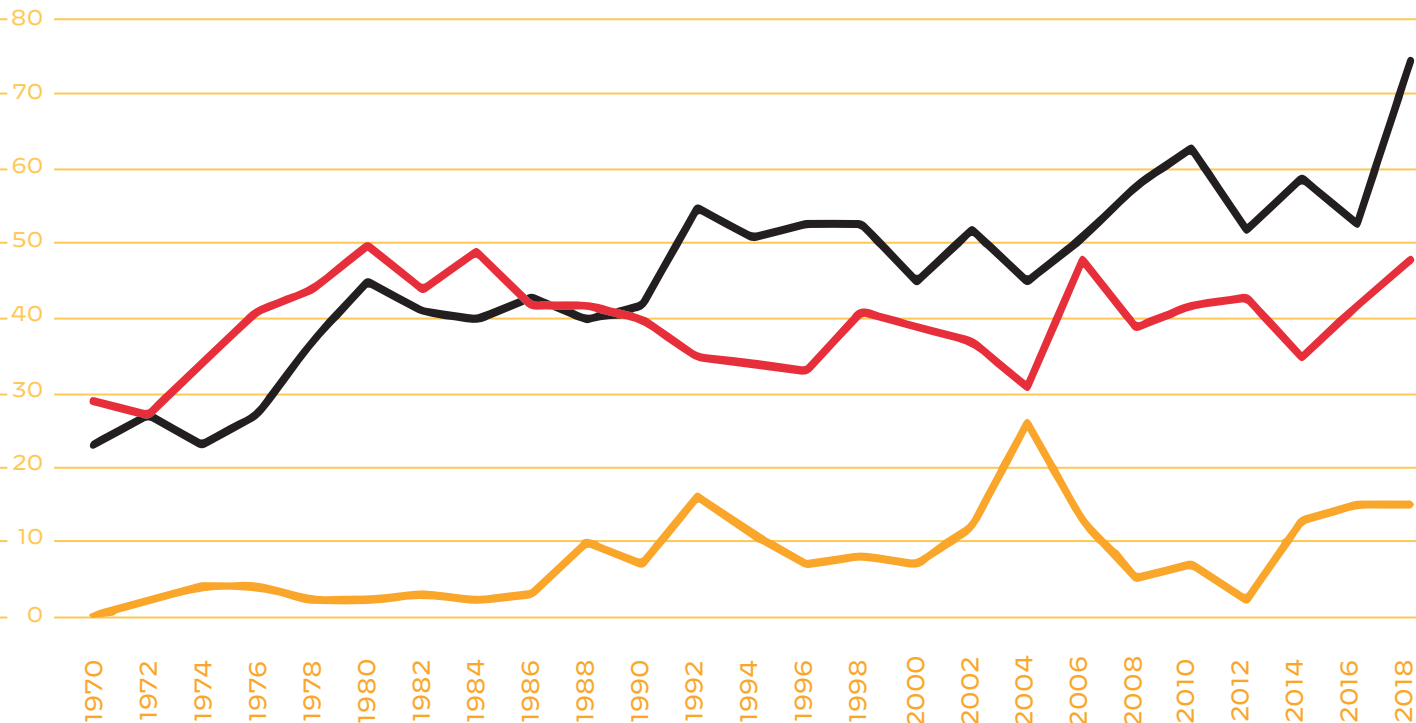
*There were 38 Democratic women  
and 24 Republican women serving in  
the Connecticut General Assembly at  
the end of the 2019 legislative session*

There are 38 Democratic women and 24 Republican women serving in the 2019-2020 General Assembly. Within their respective caucuses women represent 39% of the House Republicans and 7% of the Senate Republicans. For Democrats women represent 33% of the House caucus and 36% of the Senate caucus.

Both major parties have partisan organizations dedicated to recruiting, training and supporting women candidates. They include EMILY's List and EmergeAmerica for Democratic women, and Maggie's List and VIEW PAC for Republicans, but there are also several nonpartisan training centers whose focus is preparing women to run for office. In Connecticut that would include the Women's Campaign School at Yale, and Fairfield University has been hosting Ready to Run, a nonpartisan campaign training program for the past few years.

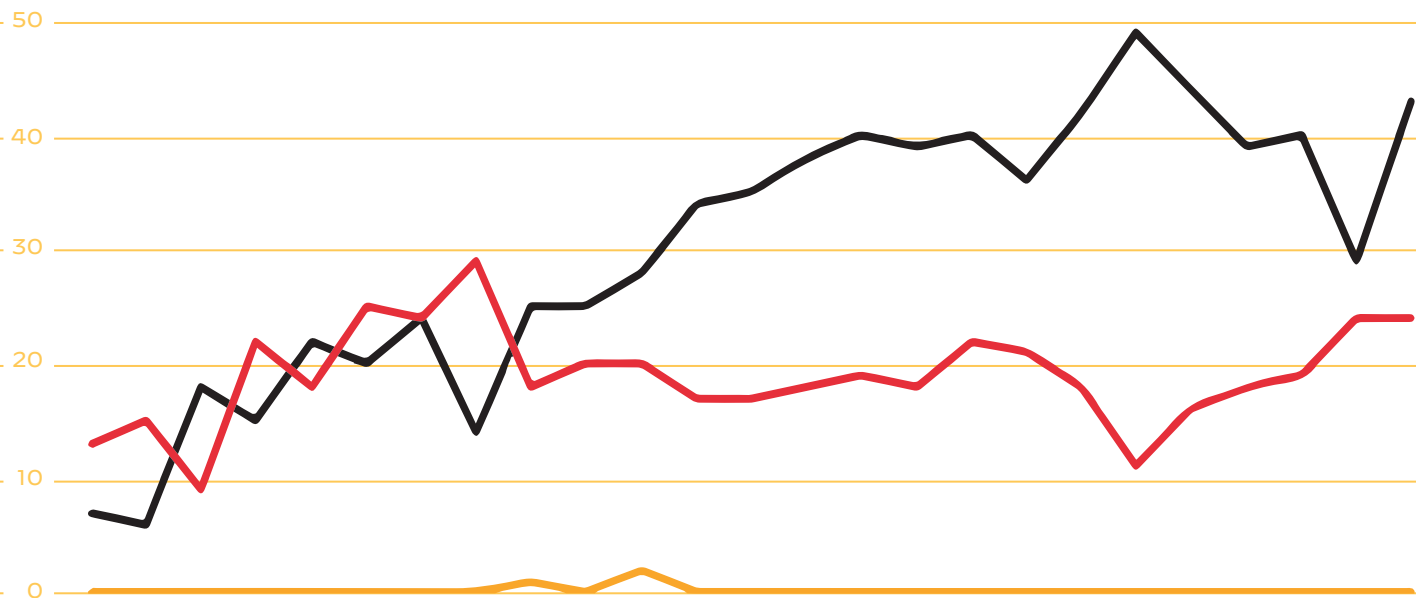
**Women Candidates:** Number of Women Candidates for Connecticut General Assembly, Statewide Office, and Federal Office by Party, 1970–2018

- Women Democratic Candidates
- Women Republican Candidates
- Women Other Party Candidates



**Women Elected:** Number of Women Elected by Party for Connecticut General Assembly, Statewide Office, and Federal Office, 1970–2018

- Women Democrats Elected
- Women Republicans Elected
- Women Other Party Elected

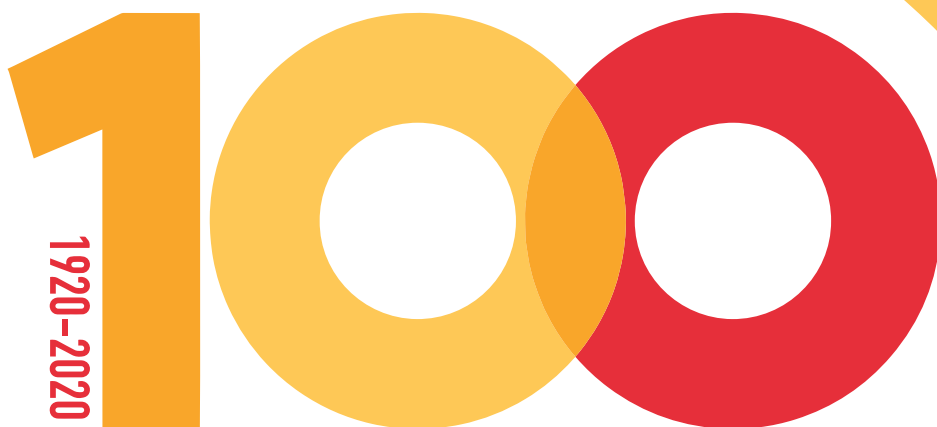




# CONCLUSION

This report is one of the many projects conducted by the Secretary of the State in honor of the centennial anniversary of women's suffrage. While we celebrate 100 years since the ratification of the 19th Amendment, we find it striking that the 48 years examined in this report is the time when women broke the most barriers and gained the most ground. In this time period women served for the first time in leadership roles in their caucuses and their respective chambers. At least one woman had served in every one of the six constitutional offices and in Congress during this period of time. In other words only in the last roughly 50 years have women started to build political power and achieve higher political office. We have much further to go, but with more visibility of women in elected office we can be role models and mentors for future women.

Special thanks to the Reflective Democracy Campaign whose assisted in the data analysis of the report. The Campaign's mission is to forge a democracy whose leaders reflect the life experiences and diverse backgrounds of all the American people.



## WOMEN VOTE

### Connecticut Suffrage Centennial



**Denise Merrill** (D) of Hartford is currently serving as Secretary of the State, and was elected to her third term in 2018. Prior to her election as Secretary of the State she served in the House of Representatives for 17 years, representing Mansfield and Chaplin (1994-2011), and in 2009 she became only the second woman to be elected Majority Leader. As Secretary of the State she has focused on expanding voting rights and increasing voter registration as well as encouraging civic education and participation. She served as President of the National Association of Secretaries of State during the 2016 election and has prioritized modernizing and securing Connecticut's elections.

