

# Few, but Mighty:

## Women and Bill Sponsorship in the Pennsylvania General Assembly



On Oct. 19, 2016, Rep. Kathy Watson (R) joined Gov. Tom Wolf and senior citizen advocates for the ceremonial bill signing of Act 48 of 2016, a new law that requires carbon monoxide detectors in residential care facilities, such as nursing homes, personal care homes, and assisted living centers.



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## Introduction

State Representative Kate Harper (R) was sitting in a hearing on autonomous vehicles. Naturally, the legislators involved were keenly interested in issues of safety and practicality. Rep. Harper's thoughts went elsewhere. As a former caregiver, Harper immediately wondered whether self-driving cars had the potential to help keep seniors in their homes after loss of function would normally resign them to nursing homes. A different perspective, certainly, and one that Harper credits to being a woman with a seat at the legislative table.

Like Rep. Harper, scholars of American politics frequently cite the different perspective, life experiences, and skill sets that women bring to the table as legislators, but women's underrepresentation in American politics has made the impact difficult to discern. Indeed, women have always been underrepresented in American politics, and 2017 is no different. Almost nowhere is this more true than the Pennsylvania General Assembly, where women hold only 19 percent of seats (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2017). This matters more than just the disproportionate numbers. Research of other legislative bodies has found that when women are elected to office they are more likely to advocate for women's issues, are more successful at guiding legislation through the legislative process, and can help create a more collaborative lawmaking environment (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013; Barnello and Bratton 2007; Kathlene 1998; Gagliarducci and Paserman 2016; Anzia and Berry 2011; Cowell-Meyers and Langbein 2009). **Could Pennsylvania stand to benefit from more women legislators?** By analyzing bill sponsorship data from the Commonwealth, we seek to shed light on the role Pennsylvania's women legislators have been playing in the General Assembly and offer insight into how their presence has affected lawmaking in the state.

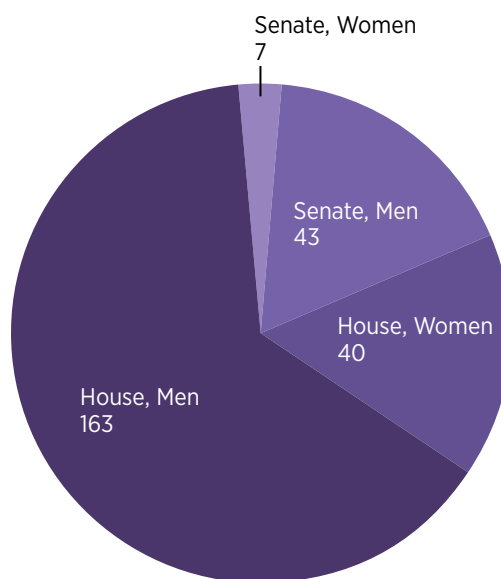
Throughout this report, we offer a look at the unique strengths that women bring to policymaking and their impact on government is examined. We start by examining women's representation in government, highlighting the underrepresentation of women both in the Pennsylvania state legislature and national offices. The link between women's representation and state policy is articulated, and areas of concern are addressed. Sponsorship, bipartisanship,

collaboration, and legislative success are each explored. We address questions specific to the role of gender in patterns of bill sponsorship in the Pennsylvania General Assembly by drawing on bill sponsorship data from Pennsylvania's 2013-2014 legislative term, as well as insights from women who served in the General Assembly at that time.<sup>1</sup>

## Women's Representation

Despite some advancement in women's representation at the national, state, and local levels of government, women are still underrepresented in 2017. Across the United States, women make up 51 percent of the population, yet hold only 19 percent of the available seats in Congress (National Conference of State Legislatures 2016). In Pennsylvania, the underrepresentation of women is particularly stark. In the 253-member General Assembly, only 40 women legislators currently serve in the House, and eight in the Senate (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics n.d.). This is not significantly higher than Wyoming, which has the lowest percentage of women held seats at 11.1 percent, and pales in comparison to Nevada, which has the highest at 39.7 percent (Manning, Brudnick, and Shogan 2015). As a result, Pennsylvania has been ranked 46th in overall gender parity (Representation 2020 2016).<sup>2</sup>

**Chart 1. Number of Legislators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, by Gender, 2017**



1 The Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics would like to thank the legislators who spoke with us: Representative Mary Jo Daley (D), Representative Pam Snyder (D), Representative Donna Oberlander (R), Representative Kate Harper (R), Representative Mauree Gingrich (R - retired), Representative Maria Donatucci (D), Representative Tina Pickett (R), Representative Becky Corbin (R), Senator Judy Schwank (D), Representative Margo Davidson (D), Representative Madelin Dean (D), and Senator Camera Bartolotta (R).

2 Gender parity scores were determined using a 0 to 100-point scale, scores of less than 50 were linked to the underrepresentation of women in elected office (Representation 2020 2016). Points were awarded to each state based off the percentages and number of women elected to local, federal, and statewide offices (Representation 2020 2016). Pennsylvania received a gender parity score of only 9.6 out of 100 in 2016.



Senator Lisa Baker (R) participates in a committee hearing.

*But, Does it Matter?* Chronic and dramatic underrepresentation of women in Pennsylvania’s legislature may be problematic because men and women tend to have different policy preferences. These policy preferences are often linked to the idea of descriptive representation, that women representatives “stand for” women in the general population by virtue of their inclusion in the same societal category (Carroll 2000, 1). The idea of descriptive representation not only includes these visible characteristics such as gender, but also shared experiences (Mansbridge 1999). In turn, it is linked to substantive representation; women will not only stand for women, but also act on their behalf. As legislators, women representatives often—and uniquely—act on behalf of other women because they feel obligated to act as a surrogate on women’s issues. In practice, this means women are more likely to support women’s issues, defined generally as those that are more likely to affect women compared to their male counterparts (Barnello and Bratton 2007, 451). More specifically, Swers (2002, 34) defines these issues as those that are most relevant to women because they focus on 1) efforts to increase equality for women, 2) addressing the unique needs of women 3) or confronting issues that appeal to women’s traditional role as caregivers. Such issues often include health care, social welfare and services, gender discrimination, and women, family, environment, and children’s issues (Center for American Women and Politics n.d.). The academic literature on women’s representation has consistently revealed how women representatives are more likely than their male counterparts to care about these issues, sponsor legislation addressing them, and support them with their votes (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

*Stalemate.* Underrepresentation not only affects policy, but also legislative effectiveness. The Pennsylvania legislature is significantly polarized, with a divide between Democratic and Republican legislators—a fact that colored the views of all the women legislators we spoke to for this report.

This division can cause difficulties due to its impact on bipartisanship, or any cooperation across party lines (Lumen n.d.). Several legislators pointed to a recent example of the impact of polarization: the five-month-long budget impasse Pennsylvania experienced in 2015 (Russ 2016). The impasse was linked to the struggle between the Democratic governor and Republican-controlled legislature. This delay impacted school districts, colleges, and other social service agencies that found themselves having to take out loans or close due to lack of funding (Russ 2016). Clearly, lack of compromise has had an impact on Pennsylvania’s ability to pass legislation within the state. However, many state legislators spoke to how many of the women of the General Assembly on both sides of the aisle started having coffee together before session during this tense period—giving them a unique opportunity to discuss, brainstorm, and consider paths to concession. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that polarization may be somewhat counteracted by increasing the representation of women in government who are often seen as being more likely to sponsor bi-partisan legislation and collaborate compared to their male colleagues (Hawkesworth, Casey, Jenkins and Kleeman 2001; Kathlene 1994). In Pennsylvania, female Republican legislators consistently outnumber female Democratic legislators (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics n.d.), but nationally, women of both parties appear more likely to reach across party lines in order to reach a consensus (Gagliarducci and Paserman 2013).

## Women’s Issues in Pennsylvania

Given both the paucity of women in Pennsylvania government and the crucial role women appear to play in addressing women’s issues, it should be no surprise that Pennsylvania is often criticized for failing to meet the needs of its female citizens. “The State of Women in America,” a study funded by the independent Center for American Progress (2013), gave the state a grade of C– (see Table 1). Other evaluations have given the Commonwealth poor ratings as well. A 2015 study by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research rated Pennsylvania in several categories of public policy for women, none of which were scored at all above average (see Table 1). Rankings were worse in a study conducted by WalletHub, a credit-improvement website which hires research analysts to conduct studies to increase transparency with its consumers (see Table 1) (Bernardo 2016).

One way in which Pennsylvania continues to lag behind is in women’s economic equity. Across the United States, women are paid only 80 cents for every dollar a man makes (AAUW 2016). In Pennsylvania, this gap is greater with women overall making 79 cents for every dollar a man makes, and women of color women falling even further behind (AAUW 2016).

**Table 1: Various Rankings of Gender Equality in Pennsylvania**

Organization	Overall Ranking	Measures
Center for American Progress	C- (28 out of 50)	Economic Security: D+ Leadership Gap: D Health Grade: C
WalletHub	(47 out of 50)	Workplace Environment: 46 Education: 34 Political Participation: 40
Institute for Women's Policy Research	No Overall Ranking	Employment & Earnings: C+ Political Participation: D- Poverty & Opportunity: C Reproductive Rights: C Health & Wellbeing: C- Work & Family: D+

Chu, Anna, and Charles Posner. 2013. "The State of Women in America: A 50-State Analysis of How Women are faring Across the Nation." September. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/StateOfWomenReport.pdf> (December 2, 2016).

Bernardo, Richie. 2016. "2016's Best & Worst States for Women's Equality." August 23. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-states-for-women-equality/5835/> (December 2, 2016).

Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2015. "The Status of Women in the States 2015." May. <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-status-of-women-in-the-states-2015-full-report> (December 2, 2016).

At this rate, it is estimated that women will not receive equal pay in Pennsylvania until 2072 (Institute of Women's Policy Research 2015). Women not only earn less than men for equal employment, but are also often employed in lower wage jobs. Of currently employed women, 32.1 percent work in low-wage jobs, while men are more than twice as likely to work in higher-paying STEM occupations (Institute of Women's Policy Research 2015). Considering conditions like these, it is not surprising that women are disproportionately affected by poverty (National Women's Law Center, 2016).

Pennsylvania currently has no laws that require employers to provide paid parental leave (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2014). In many ways, the federal government leaves it up to the state to pass their own leave protections expanding coverage of pre-existing laws (e.g. Family Medical Leave Act of 1993). Pennsylvania is one of twenty-one states that offer no additional family-leave protections. Relatedly, Pennsylvania was recently named one of the ten worst states for pregnancy discrimination (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2014).

The state has also done little in the way of childcare, an issue crucial to many of Pennsylvania's working mothers. Despite the necessity of this care, as of 2012-2013 only 28 percent of Pennsylvania's 4-year-olds were enrolled in state pre-K, preschool special education, or state and federal Head Start programs (Institute of Women's Policy Research 2015). Those who do enroll their children in daycare or pre-K have to figure

out a complex system of funding which comes from a mixture of federal, state, and local programs (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2016).

Nowhere are "women's" issues more divisive in the Commonwealth than in the area of women's reproductive health issues, and the women in the General Assembly are very clear that there are severe differences of opinion among them on issues of and related to abortion. It is difficult for them to discuss, let alone reach compromise, on any issue related to reproductive health, despite its natural classification as a women's issue. Chu and Posner (2013) point to a number of indicators that women's health needs to be addressed in the state: only 36 percent of the need for publicly-funded contraceptive services are being met by publicly-supported providers, nearly 11 percent of nonelderly women are currently uninsured with restricted access to necessary medical care, and the maternal mortality rate is at 10.1 women per 100,000 live births. While little attention is paid to these concerns for women's health, lawmakers debating abortion legislation frequently gain traction. Many women lawmakers expressed frustration that abortion issues repeatedly obstruct opportunities to deal with less controversial issues facing women.

What each of these studies spotlight is that, across numerous analyses with various measures, Pennsylvania consistently falls behind other states (and nearly all other states) in generating a public policy environment that adequately addresses women's

needs. There is evidence of persistent gender inequality and policies that negatively impact women's ability to be engaged in the workplace, provide childcare for their children, manage their health and reproductive rights, and participate in the legislative process.



As Chairwoman of the House Insurance Committee, Rep. Tina Pickett (R) listened to testimony provided by then Insurance Commissioner Mike Consedine, as part of the overall budget process for the 2014-15 fiscal year. The House Appropriations Committee invites all standing committee chairmen to participate in budget hearings for their respective committees.

Many of these poor conditions are tied to policy concerns cited vaguely as “women’s” issues, though others are the result of inaction due to a lack of bipartisan support. “Women’s” issues are often thought to be an area of concern to female legislators, which provokes the question this report attempts to address: **How does the underrepresentation of women in Pennsylvania’s legislature affect policy for women in the state?** As such, we examine gender-based differences, specifically, in support for women’s issue bills, and, more generally, women’s effectiveness as lawmakers in Pennsylvania. We explore the possibility that women approach working in the legislature differently, putting more effort into collaboration, and attracting more co-sponsors compared to their male colleagues.

## Methodology

We approach this question using data collected from the Pennsylvania state legislative database. Bill sponsorship data was collected during the 2013-2014 legislative term. During this term, eight women served in the Senate (5D, 3R) and 37 women served in the House (16D, 21R) (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics, n.d.). Of these, only six (2D, 4R) chaired committees. In all, more than 3800 bills were evaluated, approximately 1400 Senate bills and 2400 House bills. Bills were analyzed by sponsorship, topic, and

legislative success, in an effort to examine the role women legislators play in lawmaking within the Commonwealth. For each bill, we gathered data which included: bill number, bill title, date introduced, status of bill, date passed, days on legislative agenda, and last day of activity. Primary sponsor gender, party, sponsor district, and years of service were also examined. Overall, men sponsored a majority of bills (86 percent). We also examined patterns of co-sponsorship in the bill sponsorship data. The average number of co-sponsors on a bill was 17.2, though numbers of co-sponsors varied greatly, from only one to as many as 110.

Each bill was given a primary code based on whether the legislative topic was a women’s issue or not. Women’s issues are a diverse set of topics, so two independent coders coded the women’s bills into subcategories.<sup>3</sup> Coders used Swers (2002) coding system, and divided the bills into three categories: feminist, social welfare, and antifeminist. Those classified as feminist bills included bills that protected victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, expanded family and medical leave, promoted gender equality and anti-discrimination in areas such as housing, education, and employment, created programs for women-owned businesses, or promoted funding for women’s health (Swers 2002).<sup>4</sup> Those categorized as social welfare bills included issues such as expanding health insurance, establishing regulations for adoption or child-support, and punishing crimes against the elderly and children (Swers 2002).<sup>5</sup> Antifeminist bills were those that inhibited role or gender equality.<sup>6</sup> We added a subset labeled “other” for bills that did not fall into the other three subsets. All bills were given a primary code (women’s vs. other) and secondary code (topic) (see Appendix A). The modal legislative topics were budget/financial/taxes, which included 572 bills (14.8 percent) and crime/judicial with 561 bills (14.5 percent)—both topics of which were not considered women’s issues. Republican female legislators, in particular, emphasized this point when we spoke with them. As Representative Donna Oberlander (R)

<sup>3</sup> Intercoder reliability was examined using Cohen’s Kappa. In this case, the agreement rating was .874, which was statistically significant. Inconsistencies were later resolved by discussion between the coders.

<sup>4</sup> An example of a bill categorized in this subset was “An Act amending the act of October 27, 1955 (P.L.744, No.222), known as the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, further providing for findings and declaration of policy, for right to freedom from discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodation, for definitions, for unlawful discriminatory practices and for powers and duties of the commission.”

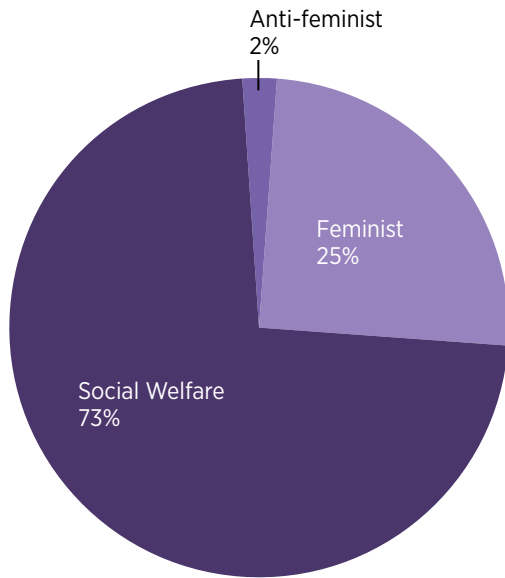
<sup>5</sup> This subset included bills such as, “An Act amending Title 18 (Crimes and Offenses) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, further providing for the offense of endangering welfare of children.”

<sup>6</sup> These bills often focused on abortion or attempted to limit the coverage of oral contraceptives. An example would be, “An Act ensuring the rights of conscience of Pennsylvania citizens relating to health insurance; and providing for health insurance coverage limitations for contraception, sterilization and abortifacient drugs and devices.”

said, she is very conscious of the fact that she represents both the men and women in her district, so she thinks more broadly about the legislative priorities she champions.

Only about six percent of all bills introduced were classified as women's issues (n=231). Most of these bills were classified as social welfare legislation (See Chart 2).

**Chart 2. Breakdown of Legislation Classified as Women's Issue Bills**



### Women's Issues

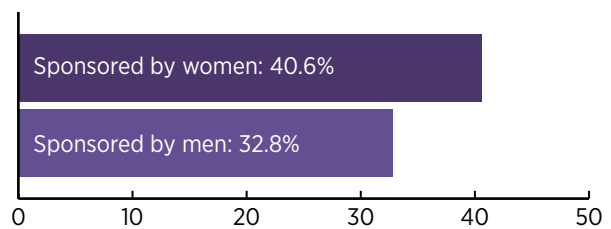
The most obvious way in which women legislators are thought to govern differently than their male colleagues is that they pay more legislative attention to women's issues (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013; Swers 1998; Gerrity, Mendez, and Osborn 2007), which are underrepresented as legislative priorities compared to men's issues (Little, Dunn, and Deen 2001). This commitment to women's issues by women legislators exists despite vast differences in class, culture, education, race, religion, sexual orientation, party, and personal history (Hawkesworth, Jenkins, and Kleeman 2001). In fact, Barnello and Bratton (2007) find that gender was the most influential factor in whether or not a member of a legislature sponsored a women's issue bill. The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP n.d.) further highlights how political party did not appear to deter representation of women and other comprehensive studies have found similar bipartisan efforts to support the policy needs of women (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). More dramatically, while Republican women are less likely to pursue women's issues than Democratic women, they are still more likely to

introduce women's issue legislation compared to Democratic men (Wittmer and Bouché 2013). Generally, this is attributed to the likelihood of women from both parties being more likely to support liberal or moderate positions compared to men (Center for American Women and Politics n.d.).

Interestingly, despite the likelihood of women producing more women's issue bills, women are also seen as being more likely to produce diverse legislative agendas. Atkinson & Windett (2015) find that women do in fact sponsor more legislation and that this legislation addresses more issue areas compared to their male colleague's agendas—including on defense and internal affairs (Atkinson and Windett 2015), often considered less "feminine" issue areas. This is consistent with research that finds women state legislators are less likely to think of themselves as policy specialists than are men (Whistler and Ellickson 2011). **Can we expect that women in the Pennsylvania General Assembly would follow similar patterns of bill sponsorship?**

It would appear that the women of Pennsylvania's General Assembly are much like those who have been previously studied in the U.S. Congress and other state legislatures. In the Commonwealth during the 2013-14 legislative session, of all the bills sponsored by women, 40.6 percent were considered women's bills (see Chart 3). Whereas, only 32.8 percent of bills sponsored by men fit into this category.<sup>7</sup> This supports previous research that suggests that women are more likely to sponsor women's issue bills compared to their male colleagues. In the Commonwealth, while men were the primary sponsor of more individual pieces of legislation, as a percentage of their representation women were much more likely to sponsor feminist legislation. Notably, while more of these feminist bills were sponsored by Democrats (35), Republicans were the primary sponsors on 23 of them.<sup>8</sup>

**Chart 3. Women's Issues Bills, by Gender of Primary Sponsor**



<sup>7</sup> This difference is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>8</sup> All antifeminist bills were sponsored by Republican male legislators.



On Feb. 8, 2016, Rep. Kathy Watson (R) was given a standing ovation by her colleagues in the state House for being honored by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children with its annual “Be Someone for Kids” award. The honor recognized Watson’s work to improve public policies that benefit the Commonwealth’s children. As chair of the House Children and Youth Committee, Watson played a critical role in recent years in helping to enact numerous laws to better protect kids from abuse and neglect.

Many of the women legislators we interviewed were quick to point out that they do not see women’s issues as their only, or even primary, focus as legislators. Much like Rep. Oberlander (R), Rep. Tina Pickett (R) emphasized that her success as a legislator is primarily because she considers the needs of all her constituents, nearly half of whom are male. Rep. Becky Corbin (R) is similarly focused on providing excellent constituent service to individuals in her district—a focus that has no gender consideration. Nonetheless, many of the Democrats (and some Republicans) we spoke to felt very strongly that they had an obligation to stand up for the needs of women. Representative Maria Donatucci (D) in particular emphasized that she absolutely prioritizes women’s issues in her legislative agenda and expressed significant concern over partisan battles that have shut down discussion on many of these issues.

Representative Madeline Dean (D) expressed a common concern: divisions around the issue of abortion make other non-abortion issues difficult to discuss. The women in the legislature are just as divided as the men (primarily along partisan lines) on this issue and, as Dean suggested, it lessens the depth of solidarity in the women’s caucus. It means other issues that concern women don’t always get the attention or consideration they deserve. She cited the minimum wage as an issue that has significant implications for women, but that many of the men serving in the legislature might not appreciate because it doesn’t affect them directly.

Women on both sides of the aisle, however, expressed concern about focusing too much on women’s issues. Representative Mauree Gingrich (R) said she understood that women needed to tackle these issues or no one else would, but that women legislators needed to make it clear that they “brought more to the table” than just advocacy for women’s issues. For Representative Mary Jo Daley (D), that means finding common ground is crucial because it allows a dialogue on issues that can improve the lives of women even if they are not explicitly women’s issues (e.g. rental agreements). Representative Margo Davidson (D) is very committed to the idea that solidarity among the women on both sides of the legislature can mean more progress on issues that are of critical importance to women, including children, family, and elderly issues. She believes leveraging the priorities of her women colleagues help move these issues forward.

## Leadership Style

Indeed, women’s distinct contribution to the legislative bodies where they serve is hardly only in the issue priorities they advocate. Women legislators also bring a different approach to governance. Kathlene (1994, 1998) finds that, in the Colorado legislature, women legislators tended to act on a broader, more inclusive, community-oriented basis compared to their male colleagues. Women committee chairs used their positions to facilitate open discussions among committee members, sponsors, and witnesses, whereas their male colleagues used their position to control hearings. More recently, Eisner (2013) found that in traits and approaches of contemporary leaders, women were more likely to focus on relationships over tasks. Women tended to encourage showing support for others, creating ideas, and emphasize listening to feedback. In contrast, men were more likely to share their power with coworkers and be inspiring leaders as well as place more value on risk taking.



Senators Kim Ward (R), left, Carmela Bartalotta (R), right, chair of the Intergovernmental Operations committee, take part in a committee hearing.



Considering the emphasis on connection with others, it is not particularly surprising that women are more engaged in constituency service compared to male colleagues. Thomas (1992) finds that women officeholders spend more hours at their jobs, more hours doing constituency service, and are more likely to regularly meet with constituents compared to male colleagues. One four-state study of state legislators found that women also received more casework requests, and were twice as likely to believe that they perform more casework than their colleagues. Female legislators were also three times more likely to agree to perform more casework if they knew they could receive additional resources to do so (Richard and Freeman 1995). None of this would come as any surprise to one of Pennsylvania’s women legislators, Representative Becky Corbin (R), who was proud to report that she is much more focused on constituency service than introducing and co-sponsoring legislation.



Representative Davidson takes part in AICUP’s Annual Student Aid Advocacy Aid Day.

Collaboration is also often thought to be a key component of women’s leadership style. Women value relationships that are empowering, egalitarian, and mutually beneficial, while emphasizing compromise, consensus building, and cooperation (Cammissa and Reingold 2004). In contrast, men’s legislative style is thought to be formal, hierarchical, and dealing with authoritative relationships, as well as being described as win-lose, involving conflict, dominance, and manipulation. Women value cooperation, whereas men are believed to be more goal-oriented (Merchant, 2012). As such, men tend to use a task-oriented approach when leading, whereas women’s leadership style relies heavily on the quality of interpersonal relationships they establish.

Leadership style and collaboration link to another area of interest: co-sponsorship among women. Previous research indicates that bills sponsored by women legislators have more co-sponsors than those sponsored by men. In fact, women in the U.S. Congress, on average, sponsor three more bills per

congress compared to their male colleagues—about 17 percent more (Anzia and Berry 2011). Furthermore, this legislation gets more support. Women of both parties recruit more cosponsors for their legislation (Gagliarducci and Paserman 2016). Women were not only more likely to attract cosponsors to their own bills, but were also more likely to cosponsor bills proposed by colleagues. On average, congresswomen cosponsored 26 more bills.

Despite their productivity as legislators, legislation sponsored by women still faces obstacles. Bills sponsored by women appeared to have less cosponsors from the opposite party (Gagliarducci and Paserman 2016). Support of male colleagues may also be key, in particular, to the success of legislation addressing women’s issues. Wittmer and Bouché (2013), find that when both male and female legislators work on addressing women’s issues, states adopt more women-friendly policies (2013). Specifically, female sponsorship alone does lead to an increase in a state’s support for women’s issues, unless men are underrepresented as co-sponsors. In this case, the legislation is less likely to be passed (Wittmer and Bouché, 2013). Essentially, it appears that the optimal legislative environment for addressing women’s issues is a near gender parity of legislators promoting these issues and participating in coalitions. **Wouldn’t we expect legislation introduced by women in the Pennsylvania General Assembly to attract more co-sponsors than legislation sponsored by the men?**

To address this question, the relationship between gender and co-sponsorship was examined. Our analysis finds that Pennsylvania’s women legislators had an average of 18.2 co-sponsors, compared to their male colleagues who had an average of 17.1 co-sponsors<sup>9</sup> (see Chart 4). The results further reflect the findings of Gagliarducci and Paserman’s (2016) study which found that female legislators recruit larger numbers of co-sponsorship on their bills compared to male colleagues.

**Chart 4. Average Number of Co-Sponsors on Bills Introduced, by Primary Sponsor Gender**



<sup>9</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

There was little disagreement on women’s leadership style among the women in the General Assembly with whom we spoke. Everyone tended to see women as working differently than their male colleagues. Senator Judy Schwank (D) and Representative Margo Davidson (D) said that they often say that women legislate differently, that they start their career with goals, and work towards those goals very pragmatically, looking immediately for likeminded legislators to join their efforts. Representative Tina Pickett (R) likened it to how women juggle the many different demands of a household—they multi-task. Representative Pam Snyder (D) agreed that the women have a handle on “everything,” while men focus on very particular things.

### Reaching Across Party Lines

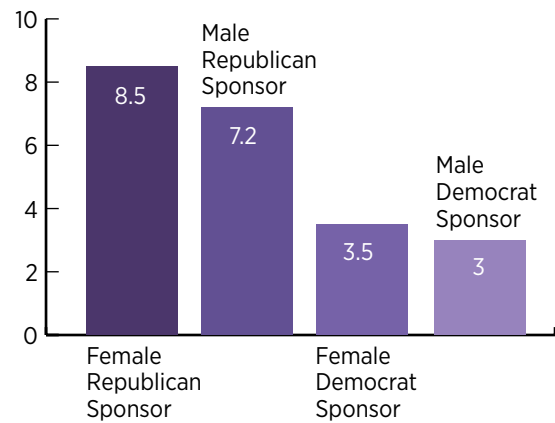
The emphasis on collaboration by women is accentuated by their tendency to also reach across party lines. Researchers at The Ohio State University found that female politicians’ approach to cooperation, conciliation, and consensus building was vastly different from most male’s solitary competitive approach (Donaldson 2011). The focus on consensus building by female legislators was particularly strong for women in the minority party (Gagliarducci and Paserman 2016). Women, generally, are more likely to reach across party lines to find support for the issue priorities—particularly if they are in the minority.

Analyzing gender and co-sponsorship by party, there is evidence that women are more likely to co-sponsor bills that were sponsored by the opposing party (see Chart 5). On the Democratic side, women legislators had slightly more Republican co-sponsors for legislation they sponsored than did their male Democratic colleagues (3.5 Republican co-sponsors vs. 3 Republican co-sponsors, respectively).<sup>10</sup> Republicans, who were in the majority during the term examined, attracted more support for legislation they proposed. Republican men had on average 7.2 co-sponsors for legislation they introduced, while Republican women averaged 8.5 co-sponsors on their legislation.<sup>11</sup> Women in both parties demonstrate a greater ability to attract fellow legislators to support their legislation.

The idea that women would be more collaborative legislators came as no surprise to most of the women legislators we spoke to in Harrisburg. Many of them spoke of the women in the legislature as being more cooperative than their male colleagues, with at least one mentioning how crucial women’s flexibility is in a legislature increasingly divided by partisan rigidity. Many of the women, primarily Democrats, but not

exclusively so, proudly referenced how women worked together—often across party lines—with other women to move legislation forward. Senator Judy Schwank (D) pointed to women’s health concerns that brought women from both parties together, in particular a domestic violence bill she and other women legislators helped pass when it would have otherwise died. She views women as more “pragmatic” and this flexibility helps them navigate obstacles that might otherwise prevent progress. Representative Mauree Gingrich (R) emphasized this flexibility as a plus for women, noting that compromise happens when women are leading, not just from the front, but from the middle and back, as well.

**Chart 5. Average Number of Opposing Party Co-Sponsors on Bills Introduced, By Gender and Party**



Representative Donna Oberlander (R) felt that collaboration with other women occurs very naturally, with or without a formal caucus because women tend to band together around common ground, and being a woman is one more place women legislators have common ground. Representative Maria Donatucci (D), who is very supportive of the idea of a formal women’s caucus, stressed how it creates a forum for women to leverage this solidarity because it “opens something up” when they are having discussions. Representative Margo Davidson (D) explicitly described many of the women legislators having an informal pact to support one another’s efforts.

However, Representative Tina Pickett (R), emphasized that the solidarity among women wasn’t necessarily the most crucial component of generating support—even for women’s issues. Women in the legislature are also rational actors who draw on collaborations across regional alliances and trusted relationships to accomplish their legislative goals.

<sup>10</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>11</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

## Legislative Effectiveness

While attention to women's issues and efforts at collaboration are important, the impact is only felt if women are successful in their legislative efforts. There is empirical evidence that they are. Women are not only more likely to introduce legislation regarding women, children, and families, but they are also more likely to successfully steer this legislation compared to their male colleagues (Thomas 1991). Cowell-Meyers and Langbein (2009) found that the increased presence of women in state legislatures increased the likelihood of success in passing legislation in some of these policy areas. Similarly, Saint-Germain (1989) found women legislators in Arizona were more successful than men at enacting their proposals, regardless of the policy area. Studies of Congress have shown similar patterns for legislation sponsored by women (Swers 1998), indicating that these patterns hold across levels of government. Women in Congress have been shown to sponsor and pass more legislation and procure more federal funds for their districts than male representatives (Anzi & Berry 2011).

However, results regarding effectiveness are mixed as well, with Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer (2013)'s examination of the United States House of Representatives over the past four decades calling into question the power of women's legislative specialization. Most notably, on bills related to health or education, women were actually less successful than men who sponsored this legislation. **Therefore, will Pennsylvania's legislative women be more or less effective at moving legislation through the legislative process?** Furthermore, we wonder if women will be more likely to effectively sponsor bills related to traditional "women's issues" such as childcare or healthcare in comparison to traditional "men's issues" such as those related to transportation or finances/taxes?



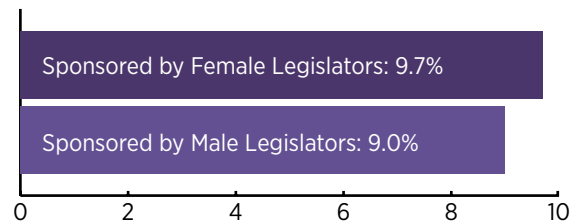
Former Representative Maureen Gingrich (R), speaks to an audience on the House floor.

Pennsylvania's female legislators do appear to be somewhat more effective at successfully steering legislation through the legislative process compared to their male colleagues. Of the

bills passed in the 2013-2014 session, female legislators had a higher percentage of their sponsored bills signed into law (9.7 percent), compared to their male counterparts (9 percent) (see Chart 6). In part, individual legislators who were quite successful in getting their sponsored legislation on to the governor's desk drove this higher rate for women. The results, in this case, further support previous research that suggests that female legislators can be more successful at getting legislation passed.

There is also evidence that women legislators are focusing these efforts on issues of importance to women. Nearly half of the bills sponsored by women that were passed and signed into law by the governor (49 percent) were women's issue bills. In contrast, only 29.5 percent of male legislator's successful legislation dealt with women's issues.<sup>12</sup>

**Chart 6. Bills Passed and Approved by the Governor, by Sponsor Gender**



Representative Kate Harper (R), with 16 years of service under her belt, was quick to point out how seniority affects women's effectiveness. Out of the bills primarily sponsored by women, the six women whose tenure had elevated them to chairing a committee sponsored more than one in ten of them. This is an important consideration given that women in the General Assembly have, on average, less seniority. The men serving during the 2013-2014 term had, on average, almost 2.5 more years of service than their female counterparts. Rep. Maureen Gingrich (R) recognized this strength as well, suggesting that others (and presumably men) couldn't bully seniority.

But other women suggested that a strong work ethic, ability to multi-task, and a focus on a more broad set of legislative issues played a part. Senator Camera Bartolotta (R) felt that being a woman could be a real advantage given women's tendency to study and work hard, which—she believes—is recognized, and respected. Representative Mary Jo Daley (D) emphasized the importance of being a pragmatist in the legislature—a trait she thought women were more likely to bring to their legislative efforts. Pragmatism was mentioned by virtually every woman legislator we spoke to as a key aspect of their success as legislators.

<sup>12</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ).

While women may be more effective at passing legislation, it is not clear how they handle claiming credit for their legislative work. A recent study revealed that male legislators were no more likely to claim credit for legislative accomplishments compared to their female colleagues, but that women are more likely to attribute success to their efforts at collaboration (Allen 2016). Another study, however, looking at newsletters produced by members of the 107th Congress, found that women are more likely to claim credit for their accomplishments (Dolan and Kropf 2004). Other research has offered a contradictory take, finding that male senators were more likely to claim credit for work on both women’s and men’s issues (Thomas 2005).



Senator Pat Vance (R) speaks during a committee hearing.

Our interviews with women legislators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly offered some insight into why making claims about how gender affects credit claiming could be difficult. While our data clearly *formally* identified who passed legislation and who, among their colleagues on both sides of the aisle, supported these efforts, the data misses one significant contribution to lawmaking that many of the women identified. Nearly all of the legislators we interviewed said that women were more likely to shop their legislation (or ideas for legislation) around to legislators who might be more successful in passing it. In some cases, this was women in the minority approaching those in the majority for sponsorship—a common strategy for men and women legislators. However, many women noted that they had “given” legislation to a male colleague whom they knew would have better success, and

several women spoke with thoughtful resignation about male colleagues who took their legislation, put their names on it, and passed it without recognizing their contribution. It isn’t clear how common this sort of behavior might be, but most of the women legislators we talked to recognized that it is something that happens. Our bill sponsorship data, then, may actually underestimate the influence women are having in the General Assembly. Interestingly, few seemed to care that they might be denied credit for their own legislative work. For the women of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the goal is to get things done, not to find some glory in doing so.

## Conclusion

“I don’t care whether **my** bill comes forward. I don’t care if my name is on it if I can help it get done. That is my philosophy, maybe even to a fault.” —Representative Madeline Dean (D)

Representative Madeline Dean (D) well-articulates a common theme among the women of the Pennsylvania General Assembly: they are willing to do the work whether or not they get credit for it. Yet, it appears these women deserve some distinct recognition. By all the measures we examine within this report, the women legislators in the General Assembly could aptly described as few, but mighty. While some of the gender-based differences are small, they do speak to the importance of women’s presence. In both our data and our interviews with legislators, we find that women are more likely to sponsor women’s issues, have a more collaborative legislative style, and be more effective at passing legislation—including legislation dealing with women’s issues. Our interviews also suggest that women may be less interested in credit claiming for their accomplishments.

These findings are consistent with a host of political science research that points to women’s effectiveness as legislators—both at the state and national level. It would appear women legislators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly are cast from a similar mold, bringing enhanced effectiveness, policy responsiveness, and more collaboration to the table. These findings, however, leave open a question crucial to good governance in the Commonwealth: **What if we elected more women?**

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## Appendix A. Legislative Topics and Coding

Issue Type	Primary Code	Topic	Secondary Code
Women's Issues	1	Women	1
Other	2	Children & Families/Domestic Relations	2
		Abortion	3
		Sexual Discrimination	4
		Health/Healthcare	5
		Social Services/Welfare/Poverty	6
		Public Utilities	7
		Equality	8
		Education	9
		Environment/Sustainability	10
		Employment	11
		Business	12
		Budget/ Financial/Taxes	13
		Crime/Judicial	14
		Transportation/Vehicle Code	15
		Military/First Responders/Veterans	16
		Technology	17
		Elections	18
		Government	19
		Insurance	20
		Real Estate/Land Management	21
		License/Regulation	22

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