

Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University Announces Forthcoming Report on Bill Sponsorship in the General Assembly

In 2016 women remain underrepresented in every state's legislature. In the Pennsylvania General Assembly this underrepresentation is particularly stark: women hold just 36 of 203 seats within the State House and only 9 of 50 in the State Senate, a mere 17.8% of total seats¹. In fact, this was a contributing factor in the state being ranked only 9.6 out of 100, on a gender parity scale by the women's advocacy group, Representation 2020.² The paucity of women in PA government ignores the value that women can bring to policymaking, not only in the form of their unique life experiences and perspectives, but also in their qualities as lawmakers. Nationally, women are known to be more likely to sponsor bills dealing with "women's issues," sponsor and pass legislation overall, increase bi-partisanship, increase co-sponsorship rates, and offer a high level of constituency service.

In the forthcoming report, *Women in the Pennsylvania General Assembly: The Impact of Women Legislators*, the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University will provide analysis of bill sponsorship data collected during the 2013-2014 legislative term. In all, more than 3800 bills were evaluated by sponsorship, topic, and success, in an effort to examine the role women legislators are playing in lawmaking in The Commonwealth. Preliminary results reveal that the lack of a critical mass of women legislators has an impact on legislation, as male

legislators are actually more likely to introduce legislation (see Fig. 1)—including legislation dealing with issues traditionally known as "women's bills"³. However, the legislation that women legislators sponsor was more likely to focus on women's issues.

Research on women in politics often captures women legislators' ability to work across the aisle, to collaborate with more of their colleagues, and sponsor, on average, more legislation. We find preliminary evidence in support of these traits in Pennsylvania, where women legislators are more likely to have multiple co-sponsors on legislation than their male colleagues. (see Fig. 2).

We also find women to be effective legislators; of the 352 bills approved by the governor, 115 pertained to women's issues and women were the primary sponsors of 53 of them.

With the 2016 general election nearing, acknowledging the work women representatives have been doing in the General Assembly emphasizes the importance of women's representation. Unfortunately, even if every woman running for a seat in the state legislature won their race in 2016, women would still be nowhere near reaching parity.

Fig. 1
Women's Issues Legislation*
Percentage of total bills introduced



Fig. 2
Co-sponsors on Bills*
Average number by primary sponsor gender



*Differences are statistically significant, $p < .01$

The full report will be available this spring. For more information, please contact Dr. Jennie Sweet-Cushman, assistant director, Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics, at jsweetcushman@chatham.edu or 412-365-1817.

¹ Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics. n.d.. "State." <http://www.chatham.edu/pcwp/research/elective-office.cfm> (September 28, 2016).

² Representation 2020. 2015. "Pennsylvania." http://www.representation2020.com/uploads/9/2/2/7/9227685/rep2020-report-final_9.11.15_4.30pm.87.pdf (September 28, 2016).

³ "Women's issues" were categorized to include reproductive rights, equal pay, violence against women, education, women's health, maternity leave, childcare, and legal issues surrounding marriage and divorce. Also, they focused primarily on feminists' concerns (i.e., equality for women) and more broad categories such as family and children as well as environmental issues and healthcare.