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***“Black Women in American Politics: 2017 Status Update” Provides a Synopsis of How Black Women Fared in the 2016 Election and Current Levels of Representation***

*Update Highlights Key Wins Across the Country, as well as Areas of Underrepresentation for Black Women*

**NEW YORK (JULY 26, 2017)** – Today [Higher Heights Leadership Fund](#) and the [Center for American Women and Politics](#) (CAWP) at Rutgers University released, “[Black Women in American Politics: 2017 Status Update](#)”. The update, an analysis of the 2016 election, highlights the key wins for women of color overall – and Black women in particular. The data demonstrate that, even with the gains Black women saw at some levels of office in 2016, there is more work to do to ensure that Black women’s representation in elected office reflects their presence in American society.

Few post-analysis reports have characterized the 2016 election as good for women. Whether because the first female nominee for president was defeated or because women saw little to no gain in representation across levels of office, the dominant gender narrative that emerged from last year’s campaign was hardly positive. But there were some key wins for women of color overall – and Black women in particular:

- Black women were 3 of the 14 non-incumbent women elected to the U.S. House or Senate in 2016. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) became the second Black woman to ever serve in the U.S. Senate; Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) was the first woman elected to represent Delaware in Congress; and Representative Val Demings (D-FL) joined Florida’s congressional delegation. Importantly, the two new Black women House members – both of whom won open seats – were elected in non-majority-minority districts, demonstrating opportunities for expanding the sites for Black women’s legislative representation.
- Black women nominees for open congressional seats fared better than women overall in 2016; in fact, they have fared better than women overall in all but two election cycles since 2000.

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- All of the net gain for women in state legislatures from 2016 (24.5%) to 2017 (24.9%) came from women of color, including a net increase among Black women state legislators from 257 (3.5%) to 271 (3.7%).
- Two Black women were elected as mayors in the 100 most populous cities in America; they are Catherine Pugh, who became the third consecutive Black woman mayor of Baltimore, MD, and Sharon Weston Broome, elected in Baton Rouge, LA.

"Black Women ran and won in 2016 at all levels of government and decisively kicked open doors that have been difficult to get through," said Glynda C. Carr, co-founder of Higher Heights. "While we are happy for the progress that we have seen, 2016 demonstrates that electing Black women to executive office continues to be challenging whether at the statewide or municipal levels."

Despite Black women's proven commitment to civic engagement and activism, Black women remain underrepresented as both candidates and officeholders, most starkly at the statewide executive level. As the update shows, only four Black women were general election candidates for statewide elected executive office in the 2016 elections, and none were successful.

The update outlines Black women's representation in congressional (3.6%), statewide elected executive (0.6%), state legislative (3.7%), and top mayoral (4%) offices in 2017. Even where their numbers have increased, there is still vast opportunity for growth in the number of Black women running and winning at all levels of office, including outside of majority-minority districts.

"As we look ahead to Black women's political future, at least in elected offices, we need to address disparities in support infrastructure – political and financial – among women, as well as identify geographic opportunities and challenges that are unique to Black women," said Kelly Dittmar, CAWP scholar and the update's author. "Our organizations are committed to this work – work that starts with raising awareness about Black women's political power."

Higher Heights and CAWP previously collaborated on a 2015 report, [Voices, Votes, Leadership: The Status of Black Women in American Politics](#), which explored the barriers and opportunities that exist to harness Black women's power at the ballot box and on the ballot.

Higher Heights and CAWP will host a media press briefing teleconference on Thursday, July 27 at Noon (ET) to discuss the update. Speakers will include Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of The City of Baton Rouge, and Attica Scott, State Representative, House District 41. The call in number is: (863) 208-0120, Pin: 415-5567#

Media coverage is welcome.

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**About Higher Heights Leadership Fund:**

*Headquartered in New York, NY, Higher Heights Leadership Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization, and its sister organization Higher Heights for America, a national 501(c)(4) organization is investing in a long-term strategy to analyze, expand and support a Black women's leadership pipeline at all levels and strengthen their civic participation beyond just Election Day. For additional information please visit, <http://www.higherheightsleadershipfund.org/>.*

**About the Center for American Women in Politics:**

*The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. For additional information, please visit <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>.*

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