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For Immediate Release

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### **New Data Punctures Persistent Myth of Women’s Representation**

For the first time, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, has collected [nationwide data on women’s representation at the municipal level](#). This data, drawing on KnowWho Data Services information on incorporated cities and towns with populations over 10,000, per the U.S. Census, punctures a long-held myth that women are more abundantly represented in local politics than their share of seats in state and federal offices. In reality, women’s representation in municipal office – mayoral offices and city councils or similar bodies – is analogous to their representation at other levels: women hold less than one-third of seats in municipal governments nationwide. Women currently hold 30.5% of municipal offices in the country, while they hold 30.9% of seats in state legislatures and 26.5% of seats in the U.S. Congress.

“It has been a long-standing aim of ours to be able to take a deeper look at the data on women in local office,” said CAWP Director Debbie Walsh. “This data already fundamentally shifts our understanding of women’s political representation in America. There isn’t some magical level of office where women have equitable representation. They’re under-represented at similar rates at every level.”

“The past year has shown us just how important local government is to our daily lives,” Walsh continued. “The ongoing COVID disaster and the law enforcement and racial justice crisis, as well as the current national debate on infrastructure investment, remind us of the imperative of having local governments that are truly representative of all voices in their communities.”

In addition to the nationwide rate of municipal representation, CAWP’s new data collection also shows how women fare in each state and allows for rankings by state on these metrics. The top three states for women’s representation in municipal office are Hawaii (50%), Alaska (46%), and Colorado (44.4%). Importantly, the number of incorporated municipalities with populations over 10,000 (according to the U.S. Census) varies significantly by state. The representational count for Hawaii, notably, is based on just one incorporated city that meets these criteria: Honolulu, Hawaii. The bottom three states, meanwhile, are Indiana (20.9%), Mississippi (19%), and Nebraska (17.7%).

These state breakdowns also allow for interesting comparisons between CAWP data on municipal and state legislative offices. In Nevada, currently the top state for women’s representation in state legislatures, with 60.3% of its legislative seats held by women, women hold just 42.6% of seats in municipal government. Meanwhile, the bottom-ranked state for women’s state legislative representation is West Virginia, where women hold 11.9% of seats, but women in West Virginia hold a significantly higher proportion of municipal government seats, with 24.1% of such offices held by women. Some states are remarkably consistent across these levels. Colorado ranks second for women in state legislatures (46%) and third for women in municipal office (44.4%), while Mississippi ranks 48th for women in state legislatures (16.1%) and 49th for women in municipal offices (19%).

“Data is an essential tool for diagnosing the representativeness of our political system,” said CAWP Data Services Manager Chelsea Hill. “And now, thankfully, we have the evidence to show there’s a great deal of room for improvement when it comes to women in local office.”

For more information about this data collection, including an interactive map and both national and state-by-state numbers, visit our new [Women in Municipal Office page](#).

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## **About CAWP**

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 women’s political participation in the United States. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women’s influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government. CAWP’s education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women’s underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, intersectional, and imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation’s highest offices, CAWP’s five decades of analyzing and interpreting women’s participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion.