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## **Serving their States, Building Potential for the Future: Women of Color in State Legislatures**

When the story of women in 2016 congressional elections was written, the overall number of women serving in Congress remained the same, but the number of women of color grew significantly. Of the 14 new women elected to Congress, nine were women of color. Three new women of color entered the U.S. Senate, expanding the total there from one to four and quadrupling all-time high to serve simultaneously. In the U.S. House of Representatives, six new women of color brought the House total to 34, also an all-time high.

Since state legislatures often serve as pipelines to higher office, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) examined the number of women of color in each state legislature, both as a proportion of women and as a proportion of legislators overall. Nationally, women of color hold 5.9 percent of all state legislative seats; 23.7 percent of women lawmakers are women of color.

Debbie Walsh, director of CAWP, noted, "Research tells us that women of color bring their distinctive voices and experiences to elective office. Since communities of color have always been underrepresented in government, it's important to strengthen their presence and impact at every level. We made progress in the recent elections, but we need many more women of color to run and win."

The state with the largest proportion of women of color among its women legislators is Hawaii (76.2 percent), followed by Texas (62.2 percent), Alabama (60.0 percent), California (57.7 percent) and Mississippi (54.2 percent). Hawaii also has the largest proportion of women of color in its legislature overall (21.1 percent), followed by New Mexico (16.1 percent), New Jersey (15.0 percent), Nevada (14.3 percent) and Maryland (13.8 percent).

At the bottom of the list, three states have no women of color in their legislatures: North Dakota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Maine has one woman of color (1.6 percent of all women, .5 percent of all legislators) in its legislature.

Full details about [women in state legislatures](#) and [women of color in elective office](#) are available on the [CAWP website](#).

### **About CAWP**

The Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey is a university-based research, education and public service center. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP is a leading authority in its field and a respected bridge between the academic and political worlds.

## Proportion of Women in State Legislatures

\*States with the exact same percentages within their category are given the same rank; states with no women of color share the rank of 48.

State	Overall Proportion of Women of Color in Legislature	Rank	Women of Color as a Proportion of Women in the Legislature	Rank
AK	1.7%	42	5.6%	43
AL	8.6%	14	60.0%	3
AR	3.0%	33*	16.0%	28
AZ	12.2%	10	31.4%	18
CA	12.5%	8	57.7%	4
CO	11.0%	12	28.2%	22
CT*	3.2%	31*	11.5%	37
DE	3.2%	31*	15.4%	29
FL	9.4%	13	36.6%	12*
GA	13.6%	6	52.5%	7
HI	21.1%	1	76.2%	1
IA	2.0%	41	8.8%	42
ID	3.8%	28	12.5%	36
IL	12.4%	9	34.4%	16
IN	3.3%	30	17.2%	26
KS	3.0%	33*	10.6%	38
KY	0.7%	46	4.3%	44
LA	5.6%	22	36.4%	13*
MA	2.5%	39	9.6%	40
MD	13.8%	5	43.3%	9
ME	0.5%	47	1.6%	47
MI	6.1%	19*	25.7%	23
MN	4.5%	24	13.8%	31
MO	3.0%	33*	13.6%	32
MS	7.5%	17	54.2%	5
MT	2.7%	37*	9.3%	41
NC	8.2%	15	33.3%	17
ND	0.0%	48*	0.0%	48*
NE	0.0%	48*	0.0%	48*
NH	0.9%	45	3.3%	45
NJ	15.0%	3	50.0%	8
NM	16.1%	2	52.9%	6
NV	14.3%	4	36.0%	15
NY	11.7%	11	43.1%	10
OH	6.8%	18	29.0%	21
OK	2.7%	37*	21.1%	24
OR	4.4%	25*	13.3%	33
PA	3.6%	29	19.1%	25
RI	4.4%	25*	14.3%	30
SC	4.1%	27	30.4%	19
SD	0.0%	48*	0.0%	48*
TN	6.1%	19*	36.4%	13*
TX	12.7%	7	62.2%	2
UT	5.8%	21	30.0%	20
VA	7.9%	16	40.7%	11
VT	1.1%	43*	2.8%	46
WA	4.8%	23	13.0%	34
WI	3.0%	33*	12.9%	35
WV	2.2%	40	16.7%	27
WY	1.1%	43*	10.0%	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.9%</b>		<b>23.7%</b>	