



REACHING THE TIPPING POINT:
**THE PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE OF WOMEN
IN GEORGIA POLITICS.**

A Her Term white paper exploring the value of electing women into public office, the causes of our current unequal representation, and the roadmap to recruiting and electing more women to lead Georgia's progressive future.

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FOREWORD

Her Term was founded in early 2017 with the vision of creating a political landscape full of progressive women running for office and winning. Her Term’s mission is to target winnable seats, recruit women leaders to run for those seats, and equip their campaigns to win. The organization currently focuses on impact in the state of Georgia.

At the time of this publication, Her Term has celebrated moving the needle in Georgia by helping to elect 15 women to public office at the state and federal levels in 2017 and 2018 (see: Appendix “The Women In Our Targeted Races”). This November, we expect to reach our goal of electing an additional 12 women at these levels. Three years of successful operations have taught us a great deal about the *why*, *how* and *what* of narrowing in on the most promising races, recruiting the best candidates, and equipping their campaigns to win.

Yet there still remain social and structural inequities that obstruct our collective efforts, and the root causes are difficult to qualify and quantify. With this in mind, we set out on the development of this white paper with the goal to research and report on the leadership role of women in Georgia’s politics. We cover the history, acknowledge notable milestones and progress, and celebrate achievements to date. Critically, we also survey the present and future landscape, identifying the still-imbalanced challenges and opportunities, underscoring the importance of action, and highlighting the real and practical ways in which individual citizens, like you, the reader, can impact change. **This research — while providing important context as to what’s happening at the national level — focuses at the state level, because that is where we have the best opportunity to create tangible change.**

This paper has a unique voice in that of Lydia Johnson, a Her Term Research Fellow, a native Atlantan, a woman of color, and a millennial. We believe the voices of her generation and those younger are integral in the decisions we make for our future. She and her peers have come of age in a political environment in which the very definition of our inalienable rights as Americans — regardless of race, gender identity, or sexual orientation, among other characteristics — is being critically reevaluated. It is our responsibility to invest in the right people and the right values so that the future is thriving for Lydia’s generation and all those that follow.

In homage to the centennial of the 19th Amendment of the US Constitution — and in hopes of stepping onto a more inclusive path as we enter a new decade — we embark on this journey of exploration, reflection, and path-finding so that we may continue to build a landscape within which women can run and win. We are joined by many voices of women and allies throughout this process, and their stories strengthen our dedication to realizing better representation.

Jane Kim Colouseus

Executive Director, Her Term

INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Lydia. As a millennial who was raised in Atlanta in the early 2000s, I had a very divided view of Georgia's culture. My friends and I always joked about being from Atlanta and not from Georgia; while Atlanta was a diverse, modern hub of culture and trends, the rest of the state felt like it was refusing to keep up, clinging to outdated traditions from a time long since over. Yet, even while I was willing to claim Atlanta as my comfortable home, the impact of Georgia politics on my life could not be ignored.

I remember my mother, a banking professional and political activist, talking about her time working on campaigns of “strong women” throughout the late 80s and 90s. In her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, she helped women get elected as district representatives, judges, and councilwomen. She would lament that she didn't see the same dynamics in Georgia, and she was surprised that Georgia had so few women even running for office. Contributing to the election of women who looked like her and shared her background was some of the most meaningful work she'd done, but her daughter was growing up in a place that didn't seem similar at all.

My experiences truly warranted her sentiments: even though I considered my preteen-self more politically aware than my average peer — meaning I was looking and paying attention — I still couldn't find many examples of strong female political leaders. There was a framed photo of former Atlanta mayor, Mayor Shirley Franklin, in my church's basement, and for most of my life, that was the pinnacle of women in politics to me. Outside of her presence, my understanding of Georgia's political hierarchy was that it was very traditional, male, conservative, and status quo.

“There was a framed photo of former Atlanta mayor, Mayor Shirley Franklin, in my church's basement and for most of my life that was the pinnacle of women in politics to me.”

The legacy of American politics thus far has been dictated by mostly men — a status quo culture that is reflected in our state and local governments as well. Yet, my entire adult life, albeit short, the polarized nature of U.S. politics has undoubtedly become more stark. The basic rights of Americans — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — are, amazingly, being reevaluated and reinterpreted as we speak. We are at the cusp of a tipping point, and, now more than ever, we should be looking for candidates and elected officials to act in our, the people's, best interests.

So, the question I ask is: where are we now, and what will it take for us to tip the scale in favor of a more representative society?

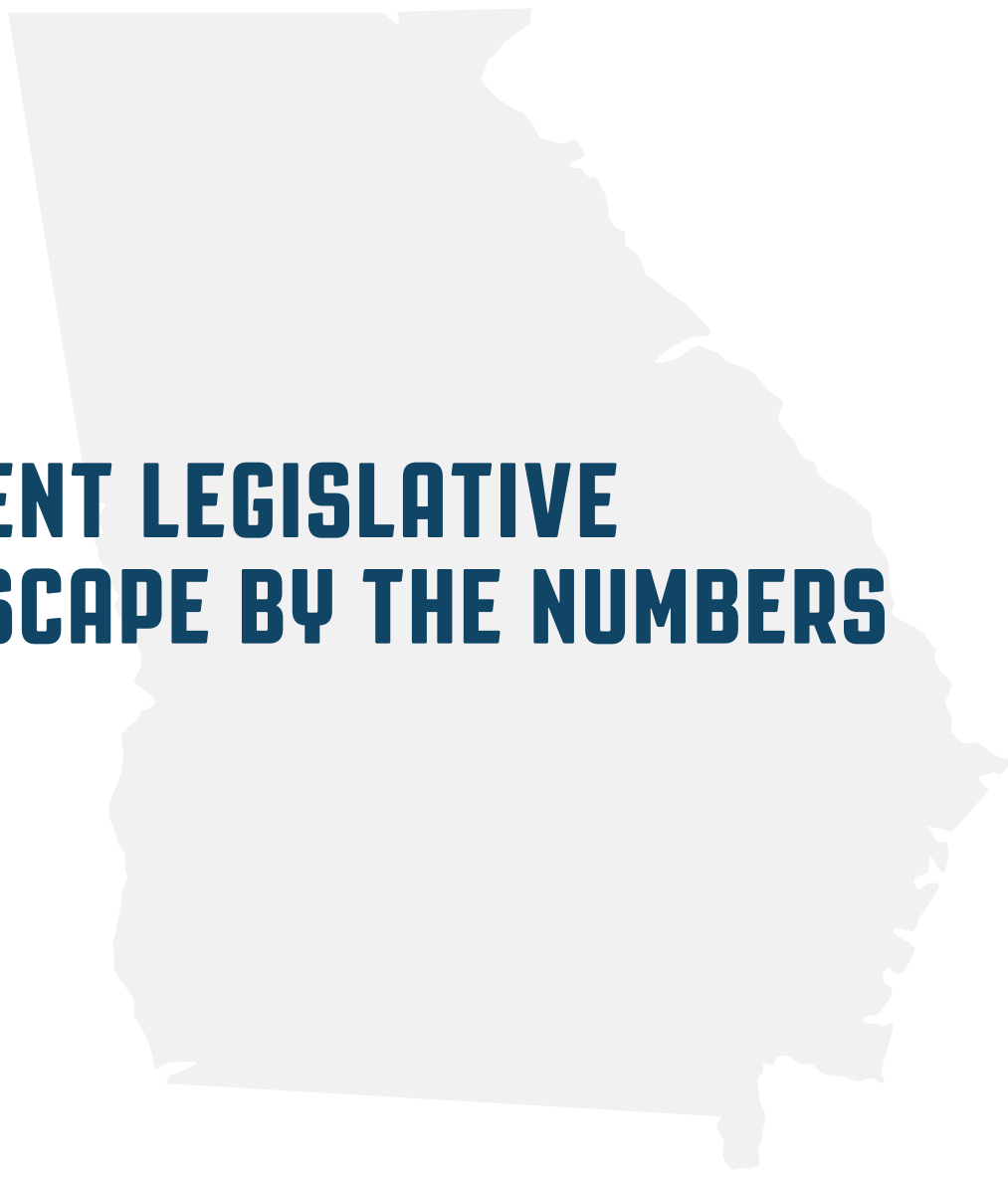
Lydia Johnson

Her Term Research Fellow, 2020



CHAPTER 1:

CURRENT LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE BY THE NUMBERS



NATIONAL

The landscape of American politics for nearly 250 years has been dominated by men. Even today, when considering the number of women in the U.S. holding state legislative offices, the 2020 national average is only 29.3% (2,161 of 7,383 seats)¹.

According to the 2019 Gender Parity Index (published by Represent Women) that looks at the number of women in all elected offices, from federal to state and local offices, states on the West Coast tend to fall closest to a true representative split (40% or higher), with most other states being in the middle, at about 21-32% parity². Southern states typically fall under the national average percentage for women in elected public offices, with several ranking in the “Bottom Ten” for gender parity. Georgia is no exception, currently ranking 43rd³; this is a slight boost from the 48th spot it held when Her Term was founded in 2017.

GEORGIA

U.S. Congress

At the federal level, women collectively hold only 24% of all congressional seats. Since the establishment of the U.S. government in 1776, fewer than a dozen women have represented Georgia in Washington D.C.

Only two of the 67 individuals who have represented Georgia in the U.S. Senate have been women. It is worth noting that neither of these women were elected but rather gained their position through political appointment.

Seven of the 309 individuals who have represented Georgia in the U.S. House have been women. None of these women have ever served concurrently. This means that at their time of service, all seven of these women were the only Congresswomen among Georgia Congressional Representatives. Currently, Congresswoman Lucy McBath (CD6), recruited by Her Term and elected in 2018, is the only woman serving Georgia in the U.S. House.

Georgia Statewide Executive Offices

Following these facts, it should come as no surprise that Georgia has had no woman governor or lieutenant governor in its entire 243 year history.

Women holding Georgia's statewide executive offices are few and far between. As a matter of fact, only six women⁴ have ever been elected to serve in the history of these offices, and there has never been a woman of color, from any party, elected to executive office.

Beyond elected officials, even if you look at positions considered to simply be top decision-making positions in the executive branch of Georgia's government, you'll find there have been few to no women in these roles.

Georgia General Assembly

In terms of the proportion of women overall in the U.S. state legislature, Georgia is currently ranked 23rd out of all 50 states.

Georgia has 236 members in the state legislature, which is made up of 180 state representatives in the Georgia House of Representatives and 56 senators in the State Senate. Of these 236, only 72 (30.5%) are women, and the majority (55) of those 72 women are Democrats. It's worth noting that 76.3% of the women in Georgia's state legislature are Democrats⁵.

No woman has ever served as Senate President Pro Tempore or as Speaker of the House.

The House of Representatives has only had two women serve as speakers; the current Speaker Pro Tempore, and Stacey Abrams as House Minority Speaker (2011-2017).

Some of the Georgia House's most powerful committees —Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules —have never had a woman in charge. As of 2020, women chair just six of the House's 41 committees⁶ and just four of the Senate's 29⁷.

The Georgia Legislative's Women's Caucus was formed as a bipartisan group in the 1990s and while its purpose was to provide bipartisan support bills that aided families and childcare, it wasn't able to provide the kind of foundational grounds for women legislators to emerge as decision-makers and influencers in the legislative body.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Though Georgia's population is approximately 51% women, the number of women in elected office (or even in leadership positions overall) doesn't even come close to this percentage. This means that more than half of Georgia's population is represented by significantly less than half of its decision-makers.

One of the consequences of such imbalance in representation is that it allows those with legislative power to push policies that are aimed at keeping women out of office (which subsequently limit women's ability to promote and help pass progressive legislation).

To change this, we must recognize the early inequities that women face when they are considering running for office, campaigning for office, and climbing the political ladder as elected officials. Only by doing so will we have more women running, giving voters a more diverse slate of candidates from which to choose.

The upcoming 2020 election marks an opportunity for us to bring ourselves closer to where we want to be. We the people must now decide what values we support, what changes we want to see, and who we want to help get us there. Georgia doesn't just have the potential for progressive changes, we have a need for them. **It's time for women to lead, too.**

Let us take a closer look at the ways in which having a more representative number of women in politics benefits us all.



CHAPTER 2:

WHEN SHE WINS, EVERYONE DOES



INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of research to prove that diverse organizations and groups perform at a higher level than those that lack diversity. When a group is able to leverage a broad spectrum of skills, experiences, viewpoints, and ideas, the overall output of the group and the subsequent benefit to all of its constituents is of a higher quality.

When we elect more women to office in Georgia, thus creating a more diverse and representative legislative body, we know that the entire body and all constituents — not just fellow women — will benefit.

In this section, we examine two ways in which a more representative legislative body in Georgia would benefit us all: more women will increase effectiveness and productivity within our government and bring to light previously overlooked issues. Following, we'll extrapolate some of the specific positive impacts this could have on Georgians.

DIVERSE ORGANIZATIONS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE

Research shows that organizations with a more equitable representation of women are both more effective and more productive than those that have less equitable representation.

Let's take an organization's financial health as one aspect of an organization's **effectiveness**. A study conducted by McKinsey and Company⁸ asserts that companies with more gender diverse boards see a direct correlation to an improvement in their financial performance, often due to increased accountability and transparency. For instance, companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to outperform on profitability and 27% more likely to have superior value creation. Moreover, when companies have culturally diverse executive teams (i.e., people of color, age/generation, LGBTQAI+, etc.), they are 33% more likely to have industry-leading profitability.

Now, let's consider the impact of diversity on an organization's **productivity**. According to data shared by the National Women's Law Center⁹, legislators serving in a legislative body that has higher women representation introduce and enact more bills overall. This is mostly due to the fact that women in office see greater legislative success rates with their introduced bills than their male counterparts. Her Term data tells the same story. **Since Georgia's two most recent legislative sessions, Her Term elected officials, while only making up 7% of the offices, have passed 10% (35) of the bills introduced and signed into law.**

DIVERSE LEGISLATURES BRING OVERLOOKED ISSUES TO LIGHT

Across industries, and especially in politics, women's representation and leadership enhance the spaces they're in by providing necessary perspectives that would otherwise be absent. In the legislative process, women elected officials are shaping policies that amplify the experiences of those voices that were previously not considered. Areas like gun safety and domestic violence, care for pregnant inmates and their children, and sexual assault in the workplace were pushed into law in 2018 and 2020, due largely in part to the efforts of women elected officials in Georgia.

Women legislators do not exclusively focus on issues that affect women only, however. Their work addresses issues that span industries and topics, from healthcare and criminal justice reform, to the economy and equality in the workplace, to name a few.

Here we highlight a sample of legislative actions for which progressive women have used their platforms to prioritize topics that impact citizens of all kinds.

Voting Rights

Progressive women stand at the forefront of the movement of protecting the voting rights of Georgians and voters across the country. They recognize that the power to win this fight stands within these elected offices: changes to the system come from inside it.

"[to make voting accessible for everyone] There are so many structural changes... that really need to be made that I can't make from the outside... Elections are a threshold issue ... if you can't vote, then you don't have a voice in all of these other issues." – Sara Tindall Ghazal, Candidate for Georgia House District 45

Former candidate for Georgia Governor, Stacey Abrams, and her organization, Fair Fight Action, fought to reinstate 22,000 of the voters who'd been removed from Georgia voter registration rolls. Congresswoman Lucy McBath was one of several who pushed for provisions in The Voting Rights Act (H.R. 1) that would allow for online voting registration and change how legislative districts are drawn.

Reproductive Healthcare

The Heartbeat Bill (House Bill 481), passed in 2019, is one of the strictest examples of abortion law in the country. It significantly restricts — even criminalizes — the control Georgia women have over their own bodies and health during pregnancy.

When the bill was first proposed, Her Term co-founder, Representative Renitta Shannon (HD89), filibustered its passage, resulting in being physically removed from the podium.

Senator Jen Jordan (SD6) shared her personal experience related to miscarriages and abortion during her dissent, emphasizing the pain of having decisions regarding your body and health be made by individuals who will never experience their consequences. In that, she said:

“If you shirk the most basic duties you have to protect the fundamental rights of women today, then no doubt the women of this state will reclaim their rights — after they have claimed your seats.”

At the legislative session in which this bill was passed, a majority of women legislators wore matching colors and brought props in protest of the bill. The bill has been judged unconstitutional by the Georgia Supreme Court — a ruling the conservative majority seeks to repeal — so the fight continues to this day.

Diverse Range of Bills

The range of bills that have been drafted, proposed, and passed by women legislators further emphasizes the scope of issues they prioritize for the benefit of all Georgians:

- ☑ **Healthcare:** Lowering the out-of-pocket costs of insulin medication (S.B. 376); requiring insurance to cover emergency medical care (S.B. 90)
- ☑ **Driver Safety:** Requiring all passengers in a vehicle to wear a seatbelt (S.B. 160)
- ☑ **Voter Rights and Protections:** Allowing same-day voter registration and voting for Primaries and Elections (S.B. 499)
- ☑ **Cybersecurity:** Establishing a government cyber security task force (H.B. 862)
- ☑ **LGBTQ+ Protections:** Prohibiting conversion therapy practices (H.B. 580)
- ☑ **Criminal Justice Reform:** Extending protections to pregnant inmates, including prohibiting shackling, invasive examinations, and strip-search practices during labor, delivery, and postpartum periods; prohibiting pregnant inmates from being placed in solitary confinement throughout these periods (H.B. 345)
- ☑ **Gun Violence:** Prohibiting individuals previously convicted of a family violence misdemeanor from receiving or possessing a firearm (S.B. 150)

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GEORGIA

We now know that organizations, including governments, are more effective when they are diversely represented. We've shown research that having more women in leadership positions within an organization, regardless of industry, is correlated to positive performance for the entire organization and its constituents.

This means that there is a penalty for opting out on diversity in our leadership. This unequivocally holds true in politics, as the business of our representatives is to provide better governance over our institutions for all Georgians to thrive.

We've seen how Georgia women in politics continue to deliver results that benefit Georgians from every walk of life, not just a select few. Among many other positive outcomes, legislators influence how we positively perceive our government, have a tremendous impact in defending and advancing legislation that appeals to many, and advocate for underrepresented perspectives to create a shift in our collective understanding of our society and culture.

Here's a thought: Is it possible that when our representative body is more gender balanced, Georgia and her taxpayers could expect better financial stewardship of the state budget, better regulation and oversight over utilities and energy infrastructures, and a more transparent and equitable approach to wealth distribution (to name a few)?

We dare say, "yes." We can build on the success of Georgia's AAA bond rating and our No. 1 spot as "Best State to Do Business" with gender-balanced legislative and executive bodies that will push for progressive measures and ensure the everyday safety and well-being of Georgia's taxpayers. This means creating more value for Georgia taxpayers by bringing creative and innovative projects and solutions that provide everyday Georgians with return of investment — in racial justice, education, healthcare, transit systems, environmental justice, affordable housing and so much more.

Next Up

We've established that we have an inequity in women represented in Georgia politics, and we've confirmed why it's in everyone's best interest to increase parity. Now let's look at some of the main reasons why we see so few women in politics, particularly fewer the higher you go up the ladder.



CHAPTER 3:

**ISSUES WOMEN FACE IN TRYING
TO ACHIEVE ELECTED OFFICE**

INTRODUCTION

Women qualified to hold public office are abundant, but they've always had to face a number of factors making it hard to do so. For one, they are rarely asked or encouraged to run, and therefore they rarely run. Second, women have very few role models to demonstrate the various paths a woman can take to become elected. Plus, the path to becoming an elected official is unkind to women.

Despite these challenges, more women have considered running for office in the last few years, especially since the 2016 Presidential Election. **In the last three years alone, Her Term consulted with more than 400 women who have considered running.** In Georgia, we have a record-breaking number of women who have committed to running for elected office at all levels — from city council to State Representative and as Congresswoman. Yet, the number of women running for office is still not proportional to the number being elected.

Further, while women who are running are winning, they're not winning at a rate that is comparable to men. Earlier in 2020, Georgia's primary elections saw progressive women lose to male incumbents and Democrat competitors with very narrow margins — sometimes just by a number of votes in the *teens*. We believe this shows that, even while voters indicate they see women as qualified to hold office, there is still a tendency to elect men.

Georgia's track record of not electing women candidates into elected offices is a reflection of the lingering issues of sexism, misogyny, and social bias towards gendered roles that remain prevalent in American politics. These constructs keep women out of the running for high-ranking offices and relegated to supporting positions for male candidates.

Next Up

As seen by this election cycle, however, this doesn't mean there is a lack of qualified women candidates running for elected office: the issue is they aren't winning because of forces outside their control. Why is that?

THE BROKEN RUNG

To truly understand the broader context of issues facing women in politics, it's important to know the concept that researchers refer to as, "The Broken Rung."

According to new research by McKinsey and LeanIn.org, the biggest obstacle to women's progress at work is not the glass ceiling keeping women from reaching the top levels of leadership. Instead, the researchers find that the biggest obstacle for women occurs at one of the very first steps on the corporate ladder—the initial promotion to management. Men are far more likely than women to be promoted from their entry-level jobs to manager, and this early inequality also explains why there are fewer women at senior levels of management—women just can't ever catch up¹⁰.

This concept, like many others we've discussed, applies to organizations and industries of all kinds, and the realm of politics is no exception.

In the context of politics, this concept explains that **it is inherently more challenging for women to advance, because early inequalities contribute to compounding challenges over time.** So, even though there is an increasing understanding of women's effectiveness as legislators and an ever-growing pipeline of women considering running for office, early inequalities in the political infrastructure and in our social construct continue to place women at an unfair disadvantage on the basis of gender.

“Although sexism and structural barriers are in many places no longer legal, they're still very much with us. Today, instead, they're cultural.” – **Hillary Rodham Clinton**

In fact, some of the biggest obstacles to electing women into office, on any level, are that women aren't running because there's a serious lack of infrastructure to support the campaigns of those who do. Some state parties, including the Democratic Party of Georgia, have made efforts to increase representation “through including state-wide women's political organizations on the executive committee or electing some of their delegates in a way that encourages more women to serve¹¹.” Even this effort, though, is only possible when women have already emerged to the top run, having already worked within the established political system.

Organizations like Her Term are focused on the bottom political rung, or the recruitment stage.

Next Up

In the next section, we discuss the hurdles to becoming an elected official, highlight some of the areas in which women face the most dramatic challenges, and point out the areas in which positive change can help us see more women elected.

ABILITY TO EARN A LIVING WAGE

One hindrance to running for office is the ability to earn a living wage. While this impacts men and women, there are important considerations relative to women.

For public office positions at the Georgia State House and State Senate level, the financial prospects are, at best, unattractive, and at worst, not feasible.

Since 2007, the annual salary for Georgia's State Representatives and Senators has been \$17,342 (this excludes per diems during the 40-day legislative session). Compared to annual salaries in states like California (\$110,459/year) and Pennsylvania (\$88,610/year), this is hardly a livable wage, despite differences in costs of living.

Further, the salary does not compensate for time spent outside of the legislative session, and the year-round work with constituents and committee meetings that occurs 24/7, 365 days a year. The Georgia General Assembly is a hybrid legislature — meaning officials spend more than two-thirds of a full-time job being legislators — yet they are paid significantly less than the average base salary of \$37,800 for legislators compared to other, similarly-situated state legislatures¹².

During the 2019-2020 legislative session, the Georgia state legislature agreed to further decrease the annual salary by approximately 10%. In fact, since the beginning of the 21st century, Georgia legislators have never seen a pay increase, and any increase seems unlikely for the time being.

As a result of these realities, most Georgia legislators depend on additional, outside streams of income to offset their legislative salaries. The year-round time commitment for the job, along with a very low annual salary, makes it difficult for many working class citizens of any gender to pursue public office. It effectively prevents citizens who are of lower income, of single households, or facing financial difficulties to even entertain the idea of becoming a public officeholder. This sustains a system that favors a certain group of the privileged and wealthy to hold elected office and helps maintain a status quo that does not reflect the economic diversity of Georgia citizens.

In American households, women are increasingly the breadwinners¹³, and a low salary can be either a non-starter or a debilitating challenge. It can make it difficult to save for retirement and meet basic financial needs. For heads of households, it creates a greater strain to cover child-care, healthcare, and education.

UNAPPEALING WORK ENVIRONMENT

A second hindrance to women running for office is that the workplace environment at the State Capitol is not an entirely productive space for women legislators.

The Georgia General Assembly was created in 1776, and only just now — 2020 — has the legislative body passed bills that aim to provide a working environment that is more conducive to women than it was before.

The workplace inequities in the Georgia State Capitol are seen in two major areas: in the building's architecture itself and in the social environment surrounding the work (particularly in leadership circles where women are few and far between).

Built-in Challenges

The most direct indicator for the state legislature not being designed with women in mind is shown in the historical lack of women's restrooms and breastfeeding rooms.

It wasn't until after the end of the 1980s that women's restrooms were finally built on the Senate side of the Capitol, and only recently have efforts been made to improve the maintenance and accommodations in these spaces. Until 2020, with the introduction of a new law (S.B. 350), state government buildings, including the Capitol, weren't required to provide accessible and free feminine hygiene products in the restrooms.

In 2000, Representative Sally Harrell faced pushback from many of her House colleagues when she decided to bring her newborn son to a General Assembly session. As the Capitol lacked proper nursing stations and childcare at the time, Harrell chose to nurse at her desk on the House floor to avoid missing votes — much to the dismay of other members. No action was taken to accommodate this challenge for other women legislators for decades; twenty years later, Charlotte's Law (S.B. 327), proposed by Her Term candidate and elected official, Senator Zahra Karinshak, presented amendments to Georgia's vague legislation regarding breastfeeding resources for women in the workplace (including the State Capitol).

Limiting Social Dynamics

As women's access to the state legislature in the most basic sense of architecture is finally modernizing, the social fabric of power and authority at the state legislature still very much favors the status quo. Women legislators often lack support on key issues from their male colleagues, face challenges in literally having their voices heard, and are excluded from social circles (in which important political decisions are also discussed and made).

Despite growing numbers of women in political spaces, they still must employ strategies to ensure their contributions and opinions are recognized in a work environment which is still dominated by men. During President Obama's first term, his inner circle lacked gender parity — a glaring obstacle for the women working in his office whose opinions and ideas were considered less serious than their counterparts. To counter this, women staffers adopted a meeting strategy called, “**amplification;**” here, women would repeat and credit a key idea presented by another woman colleague, thus drawing attention to the contribution and preventing men sharing the space from taking credit for her ideas¹⁴.

For the women elected to Georgia's legislative offices, amplification is a crucial strategy both to ensure their ideas are credited and to gain support for the legislation they are working to pass. Representative Renitta Shannon sponsored House Bill 693 to address complications leading to increased maternal mortality rates at disparate amounts for black women compared to white women. The bill was intended to extend a mother's Medicaid coverage from 60 days to a full year after giving birth, providing crucial postpartum care that was proven to reduce mortality rates. Initially, the bill got little traction and attention in the House, so every legislator from the Women's Caucus gave their time on the floor to talk about the dangers of maternal mortality and call for H.B. 693's passing. They cited findings released by a House Committee that further supported the research backing the bill, and local, women-led, reproductive justice organizations provided public attention and demand for its passing. This collective pressure led to the House's Budget Chair ultimately approving the bill with a \$20 million budget (though with the concession of lowering coverage from a year to six months to ensure bipartisan support). Without the external and internal amplification of the bill's importance in protecting the health and lives of new mothers of color, H.B. 693 might not have succeeded in such a short time frame or with as many provisions. Male legislators often do not have to put in such extensive effort to get backing for their bills; women legislators, especially women of color, have to go the extra mile.

This tactic echoes another used by Georgia legislators just decades before. The Georgia Legislative Women's Caucus, formed in the 1990s by Democrat Representative Nan Orrock, was a bipartisan effort by women legislators to have their voices heard in a predominantly men-oriented workplace. The Caucus found “areas of agreement on matters impacting women and families and to pursue them legislatively even if male colleagues weren't interested... [they] would line the walls of the mostly male Senate chamber as they voted¹⁵.” Their goal was to ensure that women across the aisle are able to come together and support each other.

It's clear that women legislatures continue to feel they must employ proactive strategies — those not considered necessary by the men in their fields - to ensure their voices are heard.

A PROCESS BUILT FOR PRIVILEGE

Navigating the political process is another major blockade in encouraging women to run for office, and Her Term is particularly focused on making it easier.

The infrastructure of American politics was built by and for those in power at the time: privileged individuals who were largely wealthy, white, and male. The system, due in part to its structure and in part to bias from those of whom are now leading within it, can be a challenging one to navigate for newcomers. Similar to how a hiring manager may tend to hire somebody who is familiar to, or like, themselves (**unconscious bias**), this system has been favoring white men over other candidates.

In Georgia, the process of running for office is not straightforward. Often, privileged information lies with only a handful of political strategists and consultants who charge for access to this information. In an already closed system, women and first-time candidates struggle to find guidance as to where to start without first opening their wallets. Therefore, without a strong support system, funding, and resources to establish a campaign, many first-time candidates are unaware of how to even take that first step.

So, it is up to organizations like Her Term, which was formed to recruit and equip candidates, to bridge the gaps and highlight the opportunities in order to strengthen Georgia's political infrastructure.

“From identification to inauguration, Her Term is with candidates; we’re connecting them to potential funders, endorsing organizations, trainers, staffers, and volunteers, and we’re being the overall support system they can lean on anytime.

– Jina Sanone, Founder of Her Term

Importantly, there are distinct challenges experienced by many women of color and those representing marginalized groups. We must address these additional burdens — the heightened experience of being different and its associated detrimental effects — and provide tailored consultations to help navigate all aspects of their identities and best serve their campaigns.

“As a black, queer woman I live at the intersection of these identities, and I know that those of us who exist in these spaces fall through the gaps. We need to have more folks at the convergence of identities to ensure that the legislation we write serves the range of these perspectives. I ran to allow voices to the communities that are often denied representation in the legislation.”

– Representative Renitta Shannon, Co-Founder of Her Term

Her Term is identifying and developing best practices for some of the most common hurdles women face early in navigating the process of running for office:

- ☑ Accessing information and insider knowledge
- ☑ Combating gatekeeping and referral issues
- ☑ Following the right “paper trail” to file for candidacy
- ☑ Overcoming not belonging to political families or circles
- ☑ Identifying and building relationships with mentors and sponsors

We also know that for every campaign, “early money is like yeast”. Yet, we see campaigns forced to spend all their hard-earned money early on services that we believe should be provided for free. These services include consultations as to which office to seek, the legal processes to get a campaign set up, and understanding the Georgia political infrastructure and its players, to name a few. While we recognize some essential services cannot be provided for free, we can try to find creative and innovative solutions to provide economies of scale so that quality consultation can still happen for campaigns without breaking their bank.

CONTENDING WITH SOCIAL BIAS

American politics is still very much a “good ol’ boys club,” and women candidates face more criticism and scrutiny than their male counterparts when it comes to their political campaigns.

The criticism and scrutiny don’t just come from their opponents, either: female candidates report facing discouraging skepticism from those whom they consider members of their closest support circles. These **microaggressions** take a toll on one’s confidence, self-esteem, and stamina.

“Most of the sexism and racialized sexism came from offhand comments... There were questions about my fitness because I was a single woman. There were questions about my capacity because I was a black woman, and so I think that... gender is always at the center of things that a lot of men don’t get asked.”

– Stacey Abrams, former Georgia House of Representative and Minority Speaker, former candidate for Governor, and Founder and Chair of Fair Fight Action

Further, female candidates often struggle with the **double-blind effect**, “whereby they are often evaluated against a ‘masculine’ standard of leadership but a “feminine” standard of likeability — and are left with limited and unfavorable options, no matter how they behave and perform as leaders¹⁶.” Women have to work harder to prove their **likability** and **electability** in ways their male counterparts do not. Women are expected to be relatable to voters but also to present

themselves with an air of power and confidence just, not too much of it..

“Research has talked about the different styles of communication between men and women: that of commanding and interrupting, in the case for men, and that of influencing and collaborating, for women... It’s a social construct, and we’ve learned it since we were all young — boys can be loud and girls should be soft-spoken. So when women take up more of this so-called masculine communication style, they’re penalized for it. They’re called names and given adjectives that make them unlikeable. Imagine how this plays out on the campaign trail — and exaggerated if you’re a woman of color or lesbian... whether they’re speaking as an expert on a subject, debating with an opponent, or stating your position on a policy, women have to take extra care to walk that tightrope of being a likeable leader.” – **Jane Kim Colouseus**, Executive Director at Her Term

There’s no doubt that the campaigns of women candidates are viewed through a highly gendered lens and that they must contend with social bias and sexism. Men are assumed to be competent; women have to prove it. Further, as a man’s perceived competence increases, his likeability is never questioned, but research shows that as a woman’s perceived competence increases, her likeability decreases (and vice versa). Women know it all too well:

“...[we are] there everyday, every night, doing what needs to be done. We do our homework, knowing there are no shortcuts. We know the way to prove doubters wrong is by making our strength, our commitment, and our results undeniable.”
– **Dr. Michelle Au**, Candidate for Georgia Senate District 48

Moreover, women must also face scrutiny over their maternal role as caregivers. Often, women are questioned on their ability to run for office and stay committed to the job while taking care of their families. Women, married or not, frequently contend with this topic, where men do not seem to at all, if ever.

“I can’t count the number of times I was asked on the campaign trail: So, who’s watching your kids while you’re here? It wasn’t a new question for me — just like other working moms, I’ve been asked this question throughout my career. No one ever asks my husband that question. We need to encourage and support moms running for office to normalize this image.” – **Lindy Miller**, former candidate for Public Service Commissioner and Strategic Advisor to Her Term

These biases aren’t only limited to women’s campaigns, either. Women are stereotyped and even pigeon-holed into staying in a woman’s space in their legislative roles once elected. Many women legislators do effectively and consistently fight for issues such as women’s rights and those related to education and family care; however, they are also effective and vocal leaders in areas such as voter protection, economics, and cybersecurity, even though these areas are often seen as being the men’s space.

“Women are still looked at to be secretaries or notetakers before men ever are... it’s harder for women to make the case that they should be in leadership and [when they are] they get challenged more. For instance, Stacey Abrams had men argue against her when she felt we should stop counties for cutting early voting; even when they ultimately all agreed on it.” – Representative Renitta Shannon, Co-Founder of Her Term

THE DANGER OF POLITICS: VIOLENCE AND THREATS

We also know that the **threat of violence and slander** based on the candidate’s gender, either to their persons or to their physical properties, is real, whether that threat is delivered verbally, physically, or virtually. There are many instances in which candidates face harassment, cyberbullying, destruction of properties, and other forms of intimidation to discourage them from running. No matter how prepared a candidate is for these attacks, which are often solely based on their gender and their personhood, these are still disturbing issues of safety not only for the candidate but for her family and staff.

A 2016 Inter-Parliamentary Union Issues Brief shared the results of a survey of the types of sexism and targeted harassment women in political positions face. This report, which includes opinions of women parliamentarians from 39 countries, echoes the constant terrorizing experienced by women running for office in the U.S., an unfortunately common reality for many candidates and legislators.

“Eighty-two per cent of women parliamentarians who participated...reported having experienced some form of psychological violence (remarks, gestures and images of a sexist or humiliating sexual nature made against them or threats and/or mobbing) while serving their terms. They cited social media as the main channel through which such psychological violence is perpetrated; nearly half of those surveyed (44 per cent) reported having received death, rape, assault or abduction threats towards them or their families. Sixty-five per cent had been subjected to sexist remarks, primarily by male colleagues in parliament and from opposing parties as well as their own¹⁷.”

At the time of the publication of this white paper, national headlines are swirling following the FBI’s confirmation that at least 13 men are facing charges in an alleged plot to kidnap and cause physical harm to Michigan’s Governor, Gretchen Whitmer.

Women in politics face such a level of mental, emotional, and even physical violence that it is essentially considered an inherent risk of the job. In the U.S., legislators have shared countless stories of targeted online harassment, racist and sexist trolling, and, in some cases, physical attacks for legislative decisions made in opposition of their peers who are men. Being critical of their men colleagues has garnered women legislators death threats, letters encouraging suicide, and even mail containing potentially dangerous substances — all of these being attempts to intimidate and discourage women from running and staying in office.

This holds true for women candidates in Georgia as well, and we see displays of intimidation more prominently in districts where the seats are held by incumbent Republican men.

“Over the past few months, I’ve had to file a police report, was cyberbullied on multiple occasions, and my yard sign was shot at... I’ve had people say that they will stand in my driveway... [and it is] these forms of intimidation have kept people quiet for generations.” – Kelly Rose, Candidate for State Senate District 17

GENDER DISPARITY AND DONORS

Connecting with donors and gaining endorsements is one of the most persistent, difficult, and critical components of a campaign, particularly in our system that favors funding from big corporations. In fact, donor funding provides one of the starkest examples of how sexism and the patriarchy leave women candidates — especially those progressives who refuse corporate funding — disadvantaged and potentially under-resourced during their campaigns.

Candidates running for more competitive seats and against incumbents are especially affected by this financial disparity. Incumbents have the advantage of previous campaign funding, an established fundraising network, and endorsements. Challengers — particularly those who are running for office for the first time, which is the case for many progressive women — often have to do a lot of fundraising from scratch. Women candidates frequently report “being excluded from financial circles that include the wealthiest and best-connected donors,” because “these circles are often based around corporations and specific industries and rarely include women¹⁸.”

Well-funded campaigns have the capacity to be more competitive; they can invest in highly-trained staff and strategists and connect candidates to more platforms for outreach. However, the bulk of the money donated to political campaigns is given to campaigns run by male candidates regardless of party affiliation.

“If you’re a woman running for office, you come in, they grill you on your policies, they grill you on everything, and then they give you \$1,000. A man goes in, they grill him a bit, but they also talk sports and other things, then they give him \$2,700.” – Sarah Chamberlain, Chief Executive of Main Street Partnership¹⁹

The donation pool for American politics is already limited, with less than 1% of Americans donating to political campaigns in the last few election cycles²⁰. (For reference, in 2018, a historical year for women to run and win office, Democratic candidates received 33.6% of all Georgia donations, and Republicans received 63.2%²¹. This shows the already significant donor gap that Democrats, in general, face here in Georgia.)

Men remain the largest group of donors, giving more to political campaigns than women do. In particular, men donate 65% more to congressional candidates than women do²², and for every itemized dollar going to a presidential candidate, about 57 cents comes from a man and 43 cents from a woman²³.

Not only do most of the donations received by candidates in the U.S. come from male donors, they also go to male candidates; further, men are shown to generally donate to male candidates at a higher rate than women candidates²⁴.

CLOSING

We close this chapter with a quote from the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg:

*“Earlier, I spoke of great changes I’ve seen in women’s occupations. Yet one must acknowledge the still bleak part of the picture. Most people in poverty in the United States and in the world over are women and children, women’s earnings here and abroad trail the earnings of men with comparable education and experience, our work places do not adequately accommodate the demands of child-bearing and child rearing, and we have yet to devise effective ways to ward off sexual harassment at work and domestic violence in our homes. **I am optimistic, however, that movement toward enlistment of the talent of all who compose “We, the people” will continue.**” – Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg*



CHAPTER 4:

HOW DO WE FIX THE ISSUES?



INTRODUCTION

We've discussed the issues of underrepresentation of women in politics in the U.S. in general and in GA in particular, we've identified the concept of the Broken Rung as a major hurdle to overcoming the issue in real and lasting terms, and we've identified the top challenges that contribute to the Broken Rung. So, how do we fix it? To fix the broken rung, we need strong commitment and direct action for change. We've identified three major areas in which we can focus our efforts.

TARGETED RACES AND PROACTIVE RECRUITING

We must prioritize our efforts on the most viable and impactful races and seats. By focusing on the most promising races, we're able to focus our resources and increase our impact.

Seeing a woman be elected into office shouldn't be a headlining phenomenon: it should be standard. It begins with tapping more women to run for office. Lack of recruitment is often named as one of the earliest challenges in getting more women on the ballot. Encouraging community leaders to translate their skills into a political campaign that is successful is one of the pillars of Her Term's strategy for securing a seat during the election.

By targeting winnable seats, recruiting women who are already leading in their communities, and equipping them with the resources needed to win, we can normalize women running and winning. When we have effective candidates positioned as winners, we change the perception of what a strong candidate looks like. This narrative legitimizes women holding political offices at all levels and creates more role models whose diverse lived experiences are valued rather than treated as collateral.

FUNDRAISING

Finding new ways to fundraise — especially when competing against an incumbent’s or established competitor’s existing “war chest,” which is often in the six-figures — is one of the top priorities in running a successful campaign; it’s also one of the biggest challenges.

Her Term connects candidates to a range of donors and fundraising opportunities, and we also encourage funding women candidates in a way that makes these spaces less exclusive altogether.

Fortunately, for now, Georgia is still a state where campaigns can be successful with a five-figure budget. As we head into the future where campaigns will become more expensive, though, it is imperative we continue to build a stronger model for successful fundraising by women candidates.

STAFFING

The most qualified political staffers are few and far between, especially in the Southeast, and connecting candidates with them can mean being able to prove that their campaign is a worthwhile investment. Enhancing a candidate’s social media presence and offline visibility require a supporting staff focused on outreach and voter engagement. They run text and phone banks and conduct on-the-ground organizing calls for volunteers who are committed to seeing a candidate succeed.

These specialized additions to a campaign team can be challenging to identify, but Georgia is on the right track. Since 2016, Georgia’s political infrastructure, as it relates to helping elect more women, has strengthened. Not only has the state party vamped up their efforts to help support candidates — a majority of them being women, active County Chairs, organizers, and activists have played an important role in helping to reach voters in their districts. Other organizations have been a part of this ecosystem as well and help to train and endorse women to run for office or help them find qualified staffers. The commitment and efforts of these groups are integral to a candidate’s success.

CLOSING

So, to fix the Broken Rung and help women candidates overcome the challenges it presents, we can focus our efforts on these three major areas: targeting winnable races and engaging in proactive recruiting, helping women candidates be competitive fundraisers, and making it easier for women candidates to access qualified staff to support their campaigns.

Together, as we strive to remove some of the mystery behind navigating political spaces, we prompt the system to slowly but surely change in a way that does not disadvantage anyone on the basis of their sex.



CHAPTER 5:
**YOUR ACTION
MATTERS**

INTRODUCTION

There is no such thing as an insignificant contribution in political spaces, but it can be hard to know how to show support beyond casting your vote. Taking the steps below is key to changing how we perceive and support women running for office and build a more representative political landscape. As supporters seeking progressive changes, we can challenge ourselves to question the status quo and assess our role in making an impact.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

You have an important role to play. Here are some suggestions to help you get started.

- ☑ Remember that the state government has the most significant and direct impact on your everyday life. It's easy to become swept up in the national discourse of politics as portrayed in the media, but try to also stay focused on what's happening in your backyard
- ☑ Support organizations that are dedicated to the cause, like Her Term
- ☑ Invest in progressive women and their campaigns through two most precious commodities: your time and money
- ☑ Hold leaders and power players accountable for progress. These can be individuals or representatives or groups, such as state party's county committee members, funding circles, endorsement organizations, and other nonprofits and organizations that have a vested interest in our political process
- ☑ Normalize the role and expectation of women as changemakers and noisemakers by amplifying and lifting up all progressive women — candidates, elected officials, organizers, activists, supporters, etc. — whose everyday efforts are making change happen

CLOSING

Our actions must be intentional. No one person can transform the world alone, and the best leaders are those backed by community. As we push for progressive women to run for office and win, we have to be a part of their support circle. This list isn't comprehensive, and there is always more work to be done. We hope that you will continue to support Her Term's mission of seeing women be elected to create a more progressive Georgia.



CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION



It's me Lydia. While working on this white paper, I was constantly asking myself, “What do I want the world to take away from this research?” Understanding the struggles women running for elected office face — from considering running to executing a campaign and beyond the election — reminds me how crucial it is to support the progressive women who are fighting to protect and advance all of our rights. I'm enthusiastic and, honestly, a bit nervous about this year's election. The feeling of going to vote, of dropping my ballot, knowing that I'm playing my part in pushing Georgia in a more progressive direction is exciting. I also realize that this election won't change everything, but it'll help us to continue to shape the better world we want to see.

*What will it take for us to see women leadership and have women in higher office?
What does it mean for me and my future - for our future? Voting for women, especially progressive women, sets a new precedent for American politics.*

We are in the midst of a historic moment in U.S. politics. The Democratic Party has announced Senator Kamala Harris, a Black, Southeast Asian woman, as their nominee for Vice President — the first time a woman of color is on a major political party's presidential ticket. Each day brings us closer to Election Day 2020, and in Georgia, numerous candidates on the down ballot are progressive women. It is an incredible feeling to know that, going into November's election, my vote will have the power to fill so many of our state's elected offices with candidates whose values, backgrounds, and missions are reflective of my own. This is the tone we are setting for our future.

This election also means so much to me, because I am finally able to see myself and my experiences being represented on the ballot. **There are candidates whose stories are like mine, and so many countless others, where even just a decade ago they went completely unheard.**

We are all changemakers. As a collective, we are the architects behind building a more progressive, equitable world for the many, not the few. The leaders we elect have the tools to make that world a reality. I know this change will not happen overnight — it will take years, and a lot of work — but it is inevitable and it is starting now, with all of us. From the progressive women running, to organizations like Her Term building the pipeline and strengthening the infrastructure, we can envision a new political landscape where progressive women are encouraged, elevated, and equipped to run successful campaigns. So, what's next? Or, a better question is, “What's now?”

Elect progressive women. Volunteer for them, fund them, organize for them; help close the gap and fix the Broken Rung. When you go to cast your votes in November and you mark your decisions on the down ballot, look at the names of the women on your ticket and ask yourself, “Whose story will my vote help her tell? How far will Georgia go under her leadership?”

Her Term's motto says it all: WHEN SHE WINS, EVERYONE DOES.



APPENDIX



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An Atlanta native, Lydia Johnson graduated from Howard University in 2019, where she received two degrees in Political Science and Spanish, and held minors in Japanese and French. Lydia is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and was recently recognized as a Fulbright Finalist to Panama. She has a deep passion for politics, international education, and global affairs, and has studied and volunteered abroad in several different countries. As a 2020 Her Term Research Fellow, she worked alongside Her Term's executive leadership to explore the challenges and experiences of progressive women shaping Georgia's political landscape for the better. She is excited to have been a part of such a timely project and wants to continue supporting local politics and campaigns. She wants to someday start her own non-profit to provide study abroad opportunities to low-income and minority students.

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We stand with #BlackLivesMatter.

THE WOMEN IN OUR TARGETED RACES

2020

Congressional District

- ☑ Carolyn Bourdeaux, District 7

State Senate District

- ☑ Nikki Merritt, District 9
- ☑ Kelly Rose, District 17
- ☑ Ceretta Smith, District 23
- ☑ Sonya Halpern, District 39
- ☑ Kim Jackson, District 41

- ☑ Matielyn Jones, District 45
- ☑ Dr. Michelle Au, District 48
- ☑ Sarah Beeson, District 56

State House District

- ☑ Priscilla Smith, District 34
- ☑ Lisa Campbell, District 35
- ☑ Elizabeth Webster, District 35
- ☑ Luisa Wakeman, District 43
- ☑ Connie Di Cicco, District 44
- ☑ Sara Tindall Ghazal, District 45
- ☑ Anthia Owens Carter, District 47
- ☑ Shea Roberts, District 52
- ☑ Stacey Evans, District 57
- ☑ Jenne Shepherd, District 57
- ☑ Rhonda Taylor, District 91
- ☑ Mary Blackmon Campbell, District 97
- ☑ Nakita Hemingway, District 104
- ☑ Rebecca Mitchell, District 106
- ☑ Emily Leslie, District 106
- ☑ Regina Lewis-Ward, District 109
- ☑ Ebony Carter, District 110
- ☑ Mokah Jasmine Johnson, District 117
- ☑ Nincoe Byrd, District 145
- ☑ Joyce Barlow, District 151
- ☑ Anne Allen Westbrook, District 163
- ☑ Julie Jordan, District 179

2018

Congressional District

- ☑ Lucy McBath, District 6 (Elected)
- ☑ Carolyn Bourdeaux, District 7

State Senate District

- ☑ Sally Harrell, District 40 (Elected)
- ☑ Zahra Karinshak, District 48 (Elected)

State House District

- ☑ Luisa Wakeman, District 43
- ☑ Mary Robichaux, District 48 (Elected)
- ☑ Angelika Kausche, District 50 (Elected)
- ☑ Shea Roberts, District 52
- ☑ Betsy Holland, District 54 (Elected)
- ☑ Beth Moore, District 95 (Elected)
- ☑ Shelly Hutchinson, District 107 (Elected)
- ☑ Dr. Jasmine Clark, District 108 (Elected)
- ☑ Regina Lewis-Ward, District 109
- ☑ Denise Edmund-Gaines, District 109
- ☑ Fenika Miller, District 147
- ☑ Joyce Barlow, District 151
- ☑ Julie Jordan, District 179

Statewide Executive Offices

- ☑ Lindy Miller, Public Service Commissioner
- ☑ Cindy Zeldin, Insurance Commissioner

2017 Special Election

State Senate District

- ☑ Jen Jordan, District 6 (Elected)
- ☑ Nikema Williams, District 39 (Elected)

State House District

- ☑ Teri Anulewicz, District 42 (Elected)
- ☑ Kim Schofield, District 60 (Elected)
- ☑ Bee Nguyen, District 89 (Elected)
- ☑ Deborah Gonzalez, District 117 (Elected)

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VISION

We envision a political landscape full of progressive women who are encouraged, elevated and equipped to run winning campaigns.

MISSION

Her Term is a collaboration to elect women. We target winnable seats, recruit women leaders to run for office, and equip their campaigns to win.