

# Louisiana Legislative Women's Caucus

The progress of women in government and in the political process has been a long, rough road. Women had very little rights in the early years of the United States. For example, women could not vote, go to college, work as doctors or lawyers and could not own property. Women were considered second-class citizens and were not allowed to participate in church administration. They had to fight to be treated equally as men. Women were granted the right to vote through the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution in 1920. The 19th Amendment stated "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

Voting was not the only obstacle women had to overcome in the United States. They also had to fight wage compensation battles. Women were paid much less money than men for working the same jobs. As a result of this disparity, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act in 1963. This act made it illegal for employers to pay women less than men for performing the same job duties. To date, pay disparities still exist between males and females.

The enactment of the 19th Amendment and the Equal Pay Act also helped Louisiana women. When women were allowed the right to vote in 1920, they gained the right to participate in the political process and altered forever the traditional roles of women in the workforce. Women traditionally worked as homemakers, cooks, maids, nurses, secretaries, receptionists and schoolteachers. The traditional role of women in Louisiana changed in 1936 when the first woman was sworn into the Louisiana Legislature. Her name was Doris Lindsey Holland. She served as state senator in Louisiana from 1936 to 1940 and served as a state representative from 1940 to 1948. This opened the door for more women to follow. Beatrice Hawthorne Moore became the second woman in the Louisiana Legislature. She served as the first female state representative from 1940 to 1944. Several other women were elected to the Louisiana Legislature. This opened the door for African-American women to be elected, as well. In 1971 Dorothy Mae Taylor became the first African-American woman to be elected to the Louisiana Legislature. She served as a state representative from 1971 to 1976. Back then women fought for equal rights, better education, and better public health.

In 1986, the women of the legislature decided that it was time to form an organized group to address issues concerning women. Five women of the Louisiana Legislature formed the Louisiana Legislative Women's Caucus, which still exists today and is made up of all the women in the Louisiana Legislature. The five women were former Representative Mary Landrieu (now the United States Senator of Louisiana), former Representative Kathleen Babineaux Blanco (who went on to serve as Governor of Louisiana), former Representative Irma Muse Dixon, former Representative Diana Bajoie (who went on to serve as a State Senator and Senate President Pro Tempore) and former Representative Naomi White Warren. The mission of the Women's Caucus was to fight for the licensing of day care centers, creation of rape intervention programs and to secure funding for battered women's shelters. The Women's Caucus grew from five members in 1986 to its highest total of 25 members in 2005. To date, the Women's Caucus has 16 members, including 12 state representatives and four state senators serving in the Louisiana Legislature. Their mission is to: (1) prepare the next generation of women leaders and (2) serve as the premiere voice and leading monitor of issues, legislation and policies, which impact women, including fighting for breast cancer awareness, pay equity, expanded child care services, domestic violence prevention, better healthcare and more economic development opportunities.

Currently, there is a total of 22 women legislators out of a total of 144 legislators serving in the Louisiana Legislature.