



YEARS

Women's Council
· Wisconsin ·

WISCONSIN WOMEN'S COUNCIL

2021-2023 BIENNIAL REPORT

July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2023

Letter from Chair

July 31, 2023

To: Governor Tony Evers
Members of the State Legislature



The Wisconsin Women's Council is 40 years old. It is my great honor to serve as the Chair of the Wisconsin Women's Council. The value of this Council in our state is unprecedented. This Council works every day with a commitment to create social and economic equity for women and girls and their families in Wisconsin. The Council is made up of 15 bi-partisan women committed to identifying issues, concerns, and challenges that women are facing in Wisconsin - with a goal of collaboratively investigating ways to improve the quality of life, equity, and equality for women in Wisconsin.

Women in Wisconsin have worked hard to move all of us forward. Women organized and organized and pushed hard to be the first state to ratify the 19th Amendment and give women in Wisconsin the right to vote. In June 1921, the Wisconsin state legislature passed the nation's first equal rights act. It stated, "women shall have the same rights and privileges under the law as men in the exercise of suffrage, freedom of contract, choice of residence for voting purposes, jury service, holding office, holding and conveying property, care and custody of children and in all other respects." So, at the start of this biennial reporting period, the Women's Council celebrated the [Centennial of Women in Public Office](#) in June and July 2021.

By 1923, 100 years ago, Lulu Shaw became the first woman elected mayor of a City in Wisconsin (City of Crandon). And, in my home county, Brown County, Ane M. Hanrahan was the first woman elected to a county board. Now, more than a century since the passage of the Wisconsin Equal Rights Act, more than 3,000 women hold elected office in our great state. Since the inception of the Women's Council in 1983, we have been lifting up and celebrating women, like those achieving these political-firsts and holding elected office. I invite you visit our website and the great factsheets and reports we created to honor these trailblazing women:

- [Wisconsin Women Roared into Public Office in the 1920s](#)
- [100 Years of Wisconsin Women Firsts](#)
- *Reports on Women in Elected Office: [State & Tribal](#), [Judiciary](#), [Counties](#), [City Government](#), and [Village Boards](#)*

However, 100 years later—even just 40 years later—we recognize that there is still much work to be done. For example, women make up 50 percent of Wisconsin's population but hold approximately 30 percent of state and local offices, and only about 12 percent of elected leadership positions. And, women of color face an even larger representation gap, accounting for just 8 percent of state legislators.

There is headway. An unprecedented number of women serve in leadership and cabinet positions for the State of Wisconsin. Each year more women are running for and elected to public office. This year, a

fourth woman was sworn into the Office of the Lt. Governor, Sara Rodriguez, who now also serves as the Governor's designee on the Women's Council. Our work is not done but, in the last 40 years with the Women's Council in place, initiatives focused on women's equality have been championed, conversations have been created around the issues of equity, and the work continues to bring more attention to the issues facing women in all walks of life in Wisconsin.

Forward Women! Here's to 40 more years of the Women's Council being successful in providing opportunities for women to attain success and equity. As the Women's Council moves forward identifying the challenges that women and girls face all over this state every day - we help them find their individual voice and strength which helps to build equality for all of us. Remember, when we are all involved in providing the power and support to lift up women and girls, lasting change will be enacted. When we all work together, we cultivate our own confidence and voice, and it is heard by many. Our potential is not limited to our gender – we should be treated equally because we are equal. Lead on Women...

Sincerely,



Denise Gaumer Hutchison
Chair, Wisconsin Women's Council

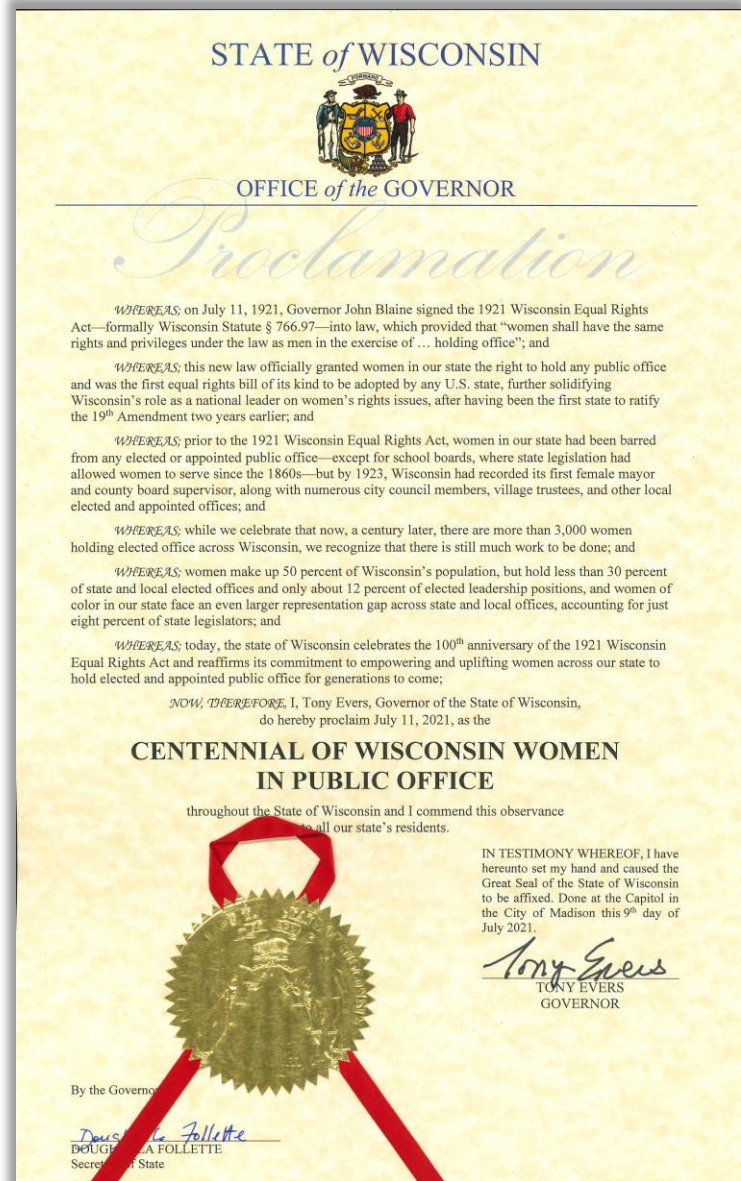


Table of Contents

Introduction	4
About the Council	4
40 th Anniversary of the Women’s Council	5
Establishment of the Women’s Council	5
Celebration	6
.....	6
Tribute to former Governor Tony Earl	6
Council Membership	8
Council Members 2021-2023	9
Current Members (on June 30, 2023)	9
Former Members.....	10
Reports	10
Women’s Council Website - Find Data Resources.....	10
Wisconsin Perinatal Health Inequities	11
20 Years of Advancing Inclusive Leadership - Milwaukee Women Inc. Research Report ...	11
Women in Public Life: Elected Officials - Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls	12
Programs and Projects	12
Wrap the Capitol for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Day of Awareness	12
Resiliency: Hmong Women’s Mental Health Journeys During the COVID-19 Pandemic....	14
Women’s History Month Roundtables.....	16
Agency Operations	17
Women’s Council Office and Staff	17
Staff	17
Interns	17
Council Affairs.....	18
Council Meetings	18
Presentations to the Council.....	19

Introduction

Pursuant to Wis. Stats. [s. 16.01\(2\)\(g\)](#), this biennial report provides updates on the activities of the Wisconsin Women’s Council. This report details the projects, programs, reports, operations, and activities of the Council for state fiscal years (SFY) 2022 and 2023 (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2023).

About the Council

The Women’s Council is Wisconsin’s statutory commission on the status of women and girls. Established in 1983, the Council promotes initiatives that empower women, serves as a clearinghouse for information on the status of women in the state, conducts independent research, and promotes unique partnerships to further women's economic and social equality and improve this state's tax base and economy.

MISSION of the Women’s Council: To enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life.

In addition, pursuant to Wis. Stats. [s. 16.01\(2\)](#), the Wisconsin Women's Council works to:

- Identify the barriers that prevent women in this state from full and equal participation.
- Conduct statewide hearings (roundtables, panels, and events) on issues of concern to women.
- Review, monitor and advise all state agencies regarding the impact upon women of current and emerging state policies, procedures, practices, laws, and administrative rules.
- Connect with all state agencies, including the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System, with the private sector and with groups concerned with women's issues to develop long-term solutions to women's economic and social inequality in this state.
- Recommend changes to the public and private sectors and initiate legislation to further women's economic and social equality and improve this state's tax base and economy.
- Disseminate information on the status of women in this state.



Past and current Council members and staff celebrating 40 years of the Wisconsin Women’s Council with First Lady Kathy Evers

Front row (L to R): Denise Gaumer Hutchison, Christine Lidbury, Eileen Mershart, Representative Jodi Emerson, Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez, Janis Ringhand, Amanda Medina-Roddy, Gabby Aranda-Pino, Carrie Richard
Back row (L to R): First Lady Kathy Evers, Jane Clark, Jenifer Cole, Rachel Fernandez, Laurie Dies, Lisa Armaganian, Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld, Senator Dianne Hesselbein, Kristine Martinsek, Patty Cadarin

40th Anniversary of the Women’s Council

Establishment of the Women’s Council

2023 marks the 40th Anniversary of the Wisconsin Women’s Council. In 1983, then-Governor Tony Earl established the Wisconsin Women’s Council by Executive Order on February 1st. [Executive Order #5](#) sets forth the rationale for the Council and its purpose, and in part, reads:

“The State of Wisconsin has a proud tradition and deep commitment to foster a community in which gender is no longer the basis of either privilege or denial of opportunity. Wisconsin women represent a majority of the population, yet in terms of economic and social status, they are still a minority. There are:

- Increasing numbers of women heading families of which they are the main source of income;
- A very high percentage of adults who fall within the federal definition of poverty are now women;
- Older women, whose numbers are rapidly increasing, and minority women even more likely to live in poverty;
- Increasing numbers of displaced homemakers are being thrust into the paid labor force with limited training and resources;
- More than one-half of Wisconsin women are part of the paid labor force and most of those who do work for pay must do so because of absolute economic necessity; and
- Women who do work for pay are clustered in undervalued, under-paid jobs.”

Executive Order #5 and the creation of the Wisconsin Women’s Council sought to address these issues and support that “every effort should be made to minimize the poverty of women and their families, which will tend to reduce human suffering, eliminate inequalities in our society and benefit the Wisconsin tax base and economy.” The Women’s Council was codified in state statute later that year with the passage of the 1983-1985 Biennial Budget.



Governor Tony Earl at the signing of the Executive Order creating the WI Women’s Council.

From L to R: Sen. Susan Engeleiter, Sen. Peggy Rosenzweig, DOR Deputy Secretary Eileen Mershart, DOA Secretary Doris Hanson, Rep. Barb Gronemus, Rep. Mary Lou Munts, Rep. Sharon Metz, Rep. Barb Ulichny, Rep. Marcia P. Coggs, DHHS Secretary Linda Reivitz, Rep. Lolita Schneiders, Governor’s Policy Advisor Roberta Gassman
 Wisconsin Historical Society, [Image 105289](#).

Celebration

To celebrate the anniversary of the Wisconsin Women's Council and honor those involved with advancing the Council's work to enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life over the past 40 years, the Women's Council held an event on March 23, 2023. Graciously hosted by First Lady Kathy Evers at the Wisconsin Executive Residence, current Council members and staff were joined by Governor Tony Evers, Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez, founding and past Council members, former staff, leaders of state agencies, leaders and community members from partner organizations focused on women's issues from around the state, current and retired elected officials, and friends of the Council.



Governor Tony Evers, Council Chair Denise Gaumer Hutchison, and First Lady Kathy Evers with Women's Council 40th Anniversary proclamation.

The networking reception included a brief speaking program, started off with a few words of welcome from First Lady Evers. Lt. Governor Rodriguez followed with remarks that included comments about the purpose and importance of the Women's Council, a tribute to former Governor Tony Earl, and sharing proclamations recognizing the Council's 40th anniversary and women's history month. To close out the speaking program, Council Chair Denise Gaumer Hutchison reflected on the work the Council has left to do to promote initiatives that empower women and further advance women's social and economic equality in Wisconsin.



Former Council members, DOA Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld and Laurie Dies with Governor Tony Evers, DFI Secretary Cheryll Olson-Collins, TEMPO Madison President Michelle Vetterkind, DFI Deputy Secretary Patti Epstein, and former Council Executive Director Christine Lidbury.



Champion of the Women's Council, former Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton and Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez.



Current Council Member Rachel Fernandez, First Lady Kathy Evers, Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN) Vice President Bianca Shaw, and WWN President Meghan Sovey.

Tribute to former Governor Tony Earl

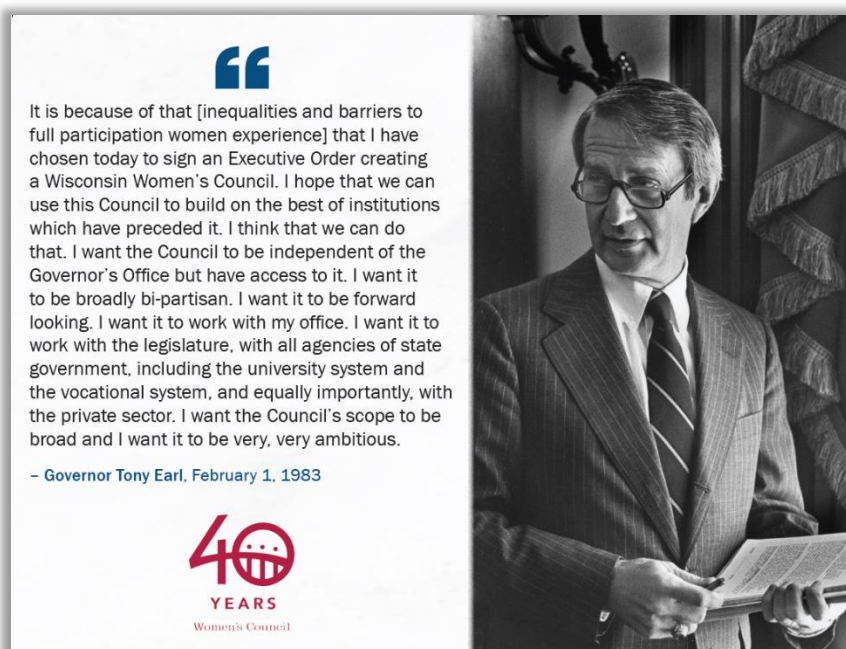
The occasion to celebrate 40 years of the Wisconsin Women's Council was bittersweet as former Governor Tony Earl passed away one month prior to the event. The Women's Council is saddened by his passing but finds joy in knowing his legacy lives on through the work of the Council and its mission to enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life.

In 1979, the 15-year-old Governor's Commission on the Status of Women was abolished despite an outpouring of support by prominent women leaders like Commission Chair Kay Clarenbach, Secretary of State Vel Phillips, Menominee Tribal leader Ada Deer, Professor Sarah Harder, Gene Boyer, Marian Thompson, Connie Threinen, and so many more. Because of this support, one of the first things Tony Earl did after he was elected Governor in 1983 was to create the Wisconsin Women's Council.

Policy Advisor to Governor Earl and founding Governor's designee on the Women's Council Roberta Gassman could not attend the 40th Anniversary celebration, but she sent a letter honoring Governor Earl. Lt. Governor Rodriguez shared Roberta's thoughtful words, in part, at the March 23rd event:

"In the summer of 1982 Tony Earl was running for governor. He and his advisors brought together a group of women leaders to advise him on what policies and practices he should advance to improve the lives of Wisconsin women if elected. Attendees were asked to bring short memos outlining challenges in key areas and recommendations for action. The women were asked to take turns going around a table, presenting their papers. Some called for the creation of a new bi-partisan council to strengthen the economic wellbeing of Wisconsin women. After listening to the group, Tony Earl stood up and said, "If elected I will act on this entire agenda." It was stunning.

This is a bittersweet time to honor the 40th anniversary of the Women's Council as we have just lost the giant who created it. Governor Tony Earl to his core, then and throughout his entire life was committed to fairness, equity, justice, and doing what was right. He didn't make policy decisions based on polls, he didn't believe in knocking others down, including his opponents. He valued friends from both sides of the aisle. He was the finest of public servants. He, like the Women's Council, leave a legacy of making Wisconsin a better place for all. May his memory be a source of inspiration to us always and may the Council thrive long into the future. Congratulations on this milestone."




“

It is because of that [inequalities and barriers to full participation women experience] that I have chosen today to sign an Executive Order creating a Wisconsin Women's Council. I hope that we can use this Council to build on the best of institutions which have preceded it. I think that we can do that. I want the Council to be independent of the Governor's Office but have access to it. I want it to be broadly bi-partisan. I want it to be forward looking. I want it to work with my office. I want it to work with the legislature, with all agencies of state government, including the university system and the vocational system, and equally importantly, with the private sector. I want the Council's scope to be broad and I want it to be very, very ambitious.

- Governor Tony Earl, February 1, 1983

40
YEARS
Women's Council



Council Membership

The 15-member council consists of public and private sector leaders, elected officials, and diverse women from across the state of Wisconsin appointed by the Governor and Legislative leadership. Pursuant to Wis. Stats. [s. 15.107\(11\)\(b\)](#), the Women's Council consists of the following members:

- The governor, or their designee.
- Six public members appointed by the governor, one of whom the governor designates as chairperson.
- Two public members appointed by the president of the senate.
- Two public members appointed by the speaker of the assembly.
- Two members of the senate, as appointed in the same manner as standing committees.
- Two members of the assembly, as appointed in the same manner as standing committees.

All Council members serve staggered two-year terms beginning on July 1st, except for the members of the assembly who serve for the period of their term in office and the governor or their designee who serves a 4-year term.



Council Members 2021-2023

Current Members (on June 30, 2023)

Governor's Appointees (7)



Denise Gaumer Hutchison
Chair
New Franken, WI



Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez
Governor's Designee
Brookfield, WI



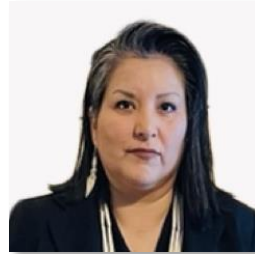
Nerissa Nelson
Vice Chair
Stevens Point, WI



Gabby Aranda-Pino
Madison, WI



Dr. Jolene Bowman
Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians
Bowler, WI



Rachel Fernandez
Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
Neopit, WI



Dr. Rosalyn McFarland
Brown Deer, WI

Senate Appointees (4)



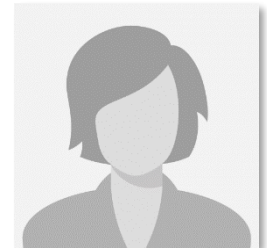
Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara
19th Senate District
Appleton, WI



Sen. Dianne Hesselbein
27th Senate District
Middleton, WI

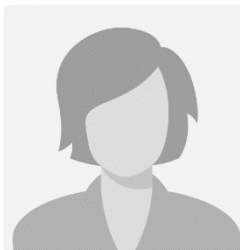


Amanda Medina-Roddy
Secretary
Waukesha, WI



Public Member
Vacant

Assembly Appointees (4)



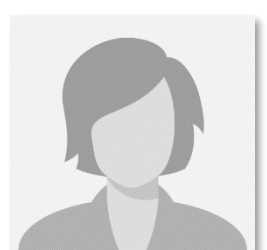
Representative
Designate legislative seat
Vacant



Rep. Jodi Emerson
91st Assembly District
Eau Claire, WI



Carrie Richard
Mazomanie, WI



Public Member
Vacant

Former Members

Former Board Members: Patty Cadorin (past Chair), Alicia Dorsett, Senator Janis Ringhand (retired), and Ze Yang (past Governor’s designee) served during the biennium between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2023.



Patty Cadorin
Milwaukee, WI



Alicia Dorsett
Waupaca, WI



Sen. Janis Ringhand
Evansville, WI

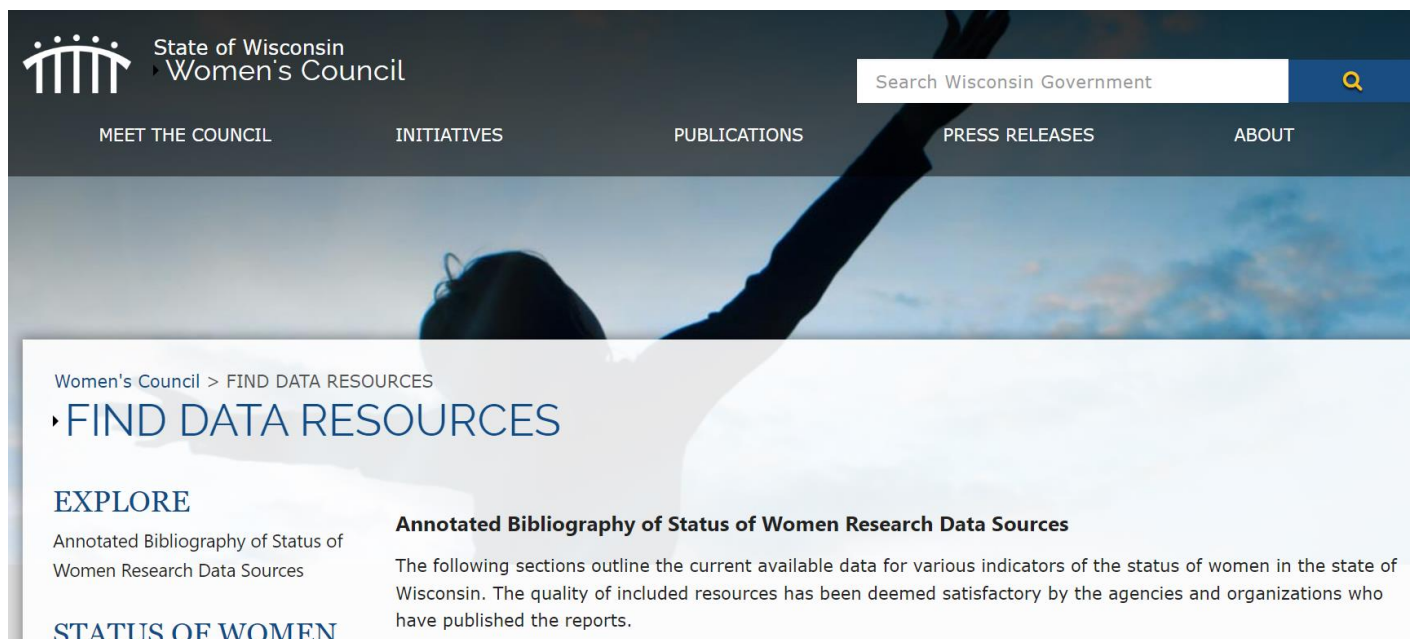


Ze Yang
Madison, WI

Reports

Women’s Council Website - Find Data Resources

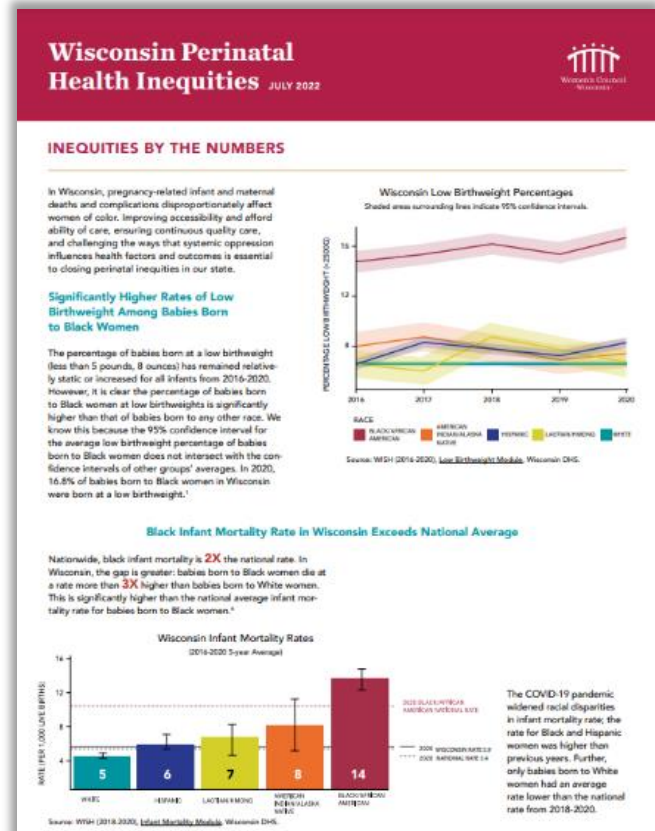
Women’s Council intern, Caitlyn Kolstermann, created a new user-friendly ‘[Find Data Resources](#)’ section on the Council’s website in early 2022 that is essentially an annotated bibliography, which provides a one-stop resource to the specific data points and sources used in analyzing and reporting on the status of women from official public databases, such as the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [State of Wisconsin Department of Justice](#). The webpage resource serves as a “one-stop data shop” for directly reporting data on topics such as the gender wage gap, women’s employment rates, and other data resources previously used for Women’s Council generated regional reports on the status of women.



The screenshot shows the website header with the logo and navigation menu. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail 'Women's Council > FIND DATA RESOURCES' and a large heading 'FIND DATA RESOURCES'. Below this, there is an 'EXPLORE' section with a link to 'Annotated Bibliography of Status of Women Research Data Sources'. A secondary heading 'STATUS OF WOMEN' is also visible.

Wisconsin Perinatal Health Inequities

In July 2022, the Women’s Council released an updated and expanded factsheet on child and maternal health in Wisconsin. The fact sheet was compiled through discussions with public health partners and publicly available data, including new material on health equity and how to look at public health data through a health equity lens. The *Wisconsin Perinatal Health Inequities* factsheet was peer reviewed by experts in public health, individuals at the [State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#), [Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness](#), and the [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#). The final report provided a one-stop compilation of current public health data and research on maternal and child health, including infant mortality in Wisconsin. The fact sheet was shared with public health partners, legislators, and available free for download on the Council website at: <https://womenscouncil.wi.gov/Documents/WWC-Perinatal-FactSheet.pdf>



20 Years of Advancing Inclusive Leadership - Milwaukee Women Inc. Research Report



In September 2022, [Milwaukee Women Inc.](#) (MWi) released their 2022 research report, [20 Years of Advancing Inclusive Leadership](#), which reports on the percentage of women serving on the boards of directors of the 50 largest Wisconsin public companies. MWi is an organization of “professional women determined to change the face and quality of leadership in the Wisconsin business community by increasing the number of women corporate directors.” The Women’s Council continued its long-standing relationship as a MWi’s research partner, with staff assisting with data identification and analysis for the report. Representatives from the Women’s Council serve on MWi’s steering and research committees.

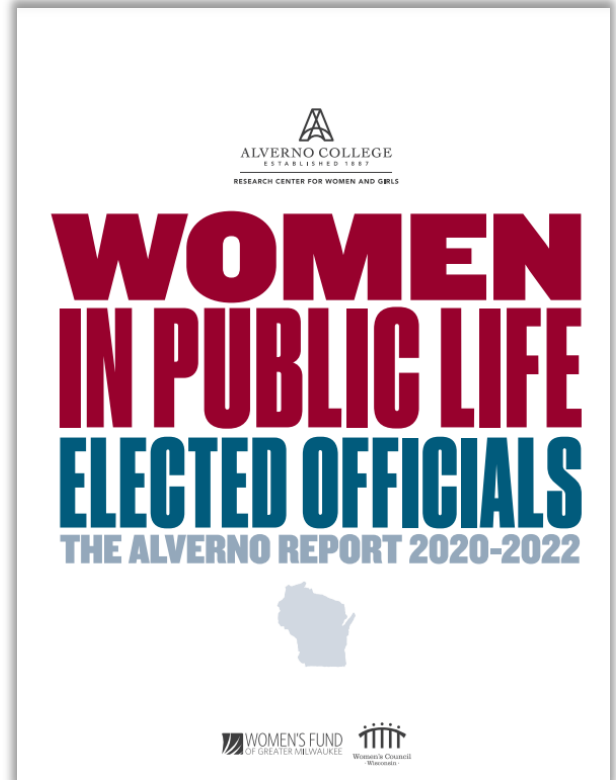
Key findings of the report included:

- “Women hold 26.3% of director seats in Wisconsin’s Top 50 public companies.”
- “Women hold 20.5% of director seats in Wisconsin’s Top 50 private companies, unchanged from 2021; however, Wisconsin exceeds the national average for private companies of 14%.”
- “Women of color hold 5.7% of director seats, up from 4.5% in 2021. While an overall increase, progress remains slow, particularly for Hispanic/Latino women.”

Women in Public Life: Elected Officials - Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls

In October 2022, [Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls](#) (RCWG) released their [2020-2022 report](#) on research intended to better understand women’s pathways to office in Wisconsin. The research brief is an updated version of RCWG’s first report: [Women in Public Life in Wisconsin](#), originally analyzing rates of women in elected office in 1970 and 1971, which sought to evaluate “all areas of [American women’s] social involvement—political, economic, cultural, etc., and all levels of their activity—local, state, national, and international” (Alverno Research Center on Women, 1971).

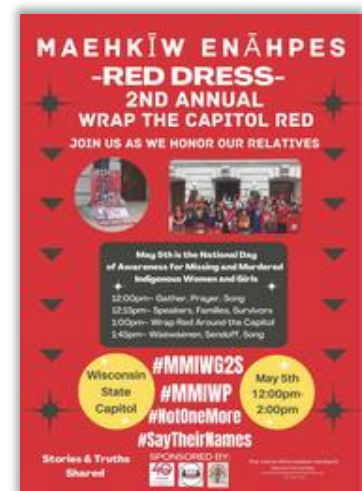
Along with the [Women’s Fund of Greater Milwaukee](#), The Wisconsin Women’s Council sponsored the research and report, as the next step in our partnership—building on the Women’s Council project with RCWG and UW-Madison Division of Extension’s Local Government Education, which explored women’s representation at various levels of government [released in early 2021](#). In addition, Women’s Council staff assisted with information shared in the 2020-2022 report and promoted it and the findings with state legislators, local public officials, and various partner organizations. The report is also available free for download on the Council website at: https://womenscouncil.wi.gov/Documents/WomenPublicLife_Web_2022.pdf



Programs and Projects

Wrap the Capitol for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Day of Awareness

May 5th is the National Day of Awareness for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) movement. Women’s Council member and founder of [Woodland Women](#), Rachel Fernandez lead efforts to coordinate the “Wrap the Capitol in Red” annual event on May 5th beginning in 2022. The event, also held on May 5, 2023, was planned in collaboration with the [Wisconsin Women's Council](#) and the [Wisconsin Department of Justice Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Taskforce](#) and centered families and survivors in this work they do to support and stand with them in healing. Both annual events were held outside the State Capitol and provided attendees an opportunity to learn and hear testimony from survivors, families, and loved ones about the impact of the MMIWG endemic. “We want to include all of our relatives whose family members have gone missing and have been murdered,”





Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez shares remarks at the 2023 MMIWG Day of Awareness.

said Rachel Fernandez of Woodland Women and member of the Women’s Council. “This includes our brothers and our two spirit relatives. We will #WraptheCapitol in red with our ribbon skirts, dresses, and ribbon shirts with song and prayer.”

It is estimated that Indigenous women and girls are murdered at a rate 10 times higher than all other ethnicities. The Centers for Disease Control has identified that murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women. Violence against Native women and girls is an under-reported problem in Wisconsin, and throughout the U.S., and cases are often misclassified or there is confusion about jurisdiction. Accurate data

protocols are needed to improve data collection and tracking information. The MMIWG Day of Awareness sheds light on these issues and supports the ongoing efforts to improve the response of social service organizations, examine the roles federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions play, and improve and implement robust data collection and reporting methods. This annual event promotes support and healing by bringing awareness and testimony to the truths of Indigenous people and the violence Native women and girls experience.



Participants at the 2022 MMIWG Day of Awareness.



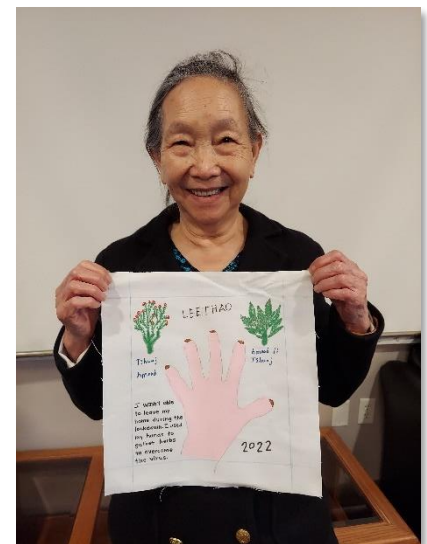
Attendees at the 2nd Annual MMIWG Day of Awareness event at the State Capitol in Madison, May 5, 2023.

Resiliency: Hmong Women's Mental Health Journeys During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In spring 2022, the Wisconsin Women's Council partnered with [The Hmong Institute](#) on a project to better understand the experiences of elder Hmong women during the COVID-19 global pandemic, particularly during the statewide public health emergency before much was known about the virus and vaccines were not yet available. This ethnographic project engaged approximately 30 senior women: participants of an ongoing women's group, Hmong Sisterhood Support Group, at The Hmong Institute's community center. The project was led by [Mai Zong Vae](#), President of The Hmong Institute's board of directors; Christine Lidbury, former executive director of the Women's Council; Ze Yang, former Governor's designee on the Women's Council and Hmong community member; and Panzee Yang, an art therapist in the local Hmong community. The project's leaders and participants met four times to discuss and examine their experiences during the pandemic. Specifically, the women:

- Engaged in a dialogue to share their experiences of the past two years when it was not safe to meet in-person or in large groups with their community;
- Discussed and processed the impacts of the pressures, stress, and isolation experienced during the pandemic on their mental health and well-being;
- Explored the ways they overcame negative mental health outcomes and found resiliency; and
- Captured their experiences and stories through a traditional means of documenting Hmong history by creating a "story cloth" or quilt wall hanging.

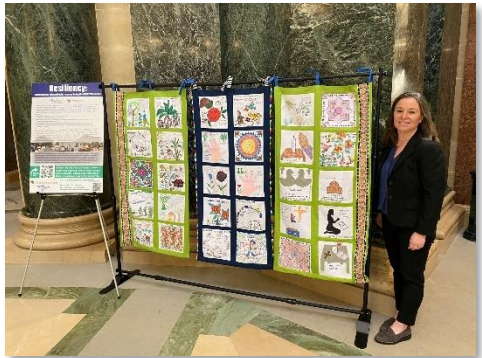
Each participant designed and created individual 12x12 inch [story cloth](#) (*Paj ntaub* - a traditional means of documenting the Hmong experience and history) that symbolically documented what inspired resiliency through pandemic-related hardships and helped them with their mental health and well-being. Through the project's discussions and story cloth creation process, three themes emerged as the participant's primary sources of strength and resiliency: their Hmong families and community, spirituality/faith, and gardening or being outdoors. These themes are captured in the story cloth/quilt triptych.



Participants of the Hmong Sisterhood Support Group creating their story cloths at The Hmong Institute, Spring 2022.

Part of The Hmong Institute’s mission is the preservation of Hmong language and culture, so during the four discussion and quilt making sessions with the Hmong Sisterhood Support Group, Mai Zong Vue interviewed each woman about her experience during the pandemic and how her story cloth captures that experience and what kept her resilient. Through funding in part by the [Wisconsin Humanities](#), these interviews were edited, translated, and captioned into an [online video](#) by Thay Vang, Video editor and producer with [NyobZoo Milwaukee TV](#).

In May 2023, in celebration of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month the Hmong women’s story cloth exhibit, *Resiliency: Hmong Women’s Mental Health Journeys During the COVID-19*, was displayed in the State Capitol. Along with the quilt panels, the exhibit also features a poster with a QR code to link viewers to the online video of interviews with the project participants. In June 2023, the exhibit moved to the [Pablo Center at the Confluence](#) in Eau Claire, Wisconsin for part of the summer.



Left: Exhibit on display at the State Capitol in Madison, May 2023.

Above: Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez visiting the exhibit, May 2023.



Right: Exhibit on display at the Pablo Center in Eau Claire, June 2023.

Above: Mai Zong Vue and Peng Her, CEO of The Hmong Institute, May 2023.



Women's History Month Roundtables

To recognize and celebrate Women's History Month and the Women's Council's 40th Anniversary in March 2023, the Council's new Executive Director, Jenifer Cole joined Wisconsin Department of Administration Secretary-designee Kathy Blumenfeld for roundtable events to have collaborative conversations about strategies to help advance women in Wisconsin.

On March 8, 2023, at the [Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation](#) (WWBIC) headquarters in Milwaukee, Secretary-designee Blumenfeld and Jenifer were joined by Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez, WWBIC President/CVO Wendy Baumann, and WWBIC Vice President of Programs and Operations Kamaljit Jackson for the first roundtable discussion recognizing International Women's Day. The panel discussed such topics as the founding of the Women's Council 40 years earlier, how women are faring in Wisconsin, how much work remains to advance gender equity, and biennial budget initiatives included in Governor Tony Evers' executive budget proposal that would lift up and support women in Wisconsin.



March 8 International Women's Day Panelists (L to R): Wendy Baumann, Secretary-designee Blumenfeld, Lt. Governor Rodriguez, Jenifer Cole, and Kamaljit Jackson.

On March 15, 2023, WWBIC hosted the second roundtable, this time at the Startup Hub in Green Bay. Secretary-designee Blumenfeld and Jenifer were joined by [Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions](#)' Deputy Secretary Patti Epstein, [Department of Workforce Development](#)'s Division of Employment and Training Administrator Michele Carter, [Women's Fund for the Fox Valley Region](#)'s Executive Director Julie Keller, [Women's Fund of Greater Green Bay](#)'s Senior VP of Community Impact Amber Paluch, and WWBIC Regional Project Director for Northeast WI Colleen Bies. The roundtable to recognize Equal Pay Day focused on topics such as wage and pay inequities, paid family leave, and other investments in women through initiatives in economic development and security.



March 15 Equal Pay Day Panelists (L to R): Amber Paluch, Julie Keller, Secretary-designee Blumenfeld, Jenifer Cole, Michele Carter, Colleen Bies, and Deputy Secretary Epstein.

Agency Operations

Women’s Council Office and Staff

Similar to other state councils, boards, and commissions, and pursuant to Wis. Stats. [s. 15.107\(11\)\(a\)](#) and under Wis. Stats. [s. 15.03](#), the Wisconsin Women’s Council is administratively attached to the [State of Wisconsin Department of Administration](#) (DOA) and contracts with DOA for office space and support services, including information technology, procurement, personnel, and finance.

Staff



New Executive Director,
Jenifer Cole

Jenifer D. Cole, MPA, CPM - Executive Director (started September 2022)

The Women's Council has one permanent full-time position. This is periodically supplemented by interns and limited term employees (LTE) for special projects.

Prior to starting the role with the Women’s Council, Jenifer held various positions in state government since 2010, including most recently as the Department of Workforce Development’s Legislative Advisor for two years. Jenifer has also worked and volunteered for numerous women’s organizations in Wisconsin, New York, and California. Of note, she served on the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Women’s Network (WWN) for eight years and for three years as the lead instructor for the WWN’s Policy Institute, an intersectional policy advocacy training for women in Wisconsin.

The previous director, **Christine Lidbury**, retired in July 2022 after serving the Women’s Council and the State of Wisconsin for over 18 years. The Women’s Council deeply appreciates Christine’s tremendous contributions in empowering and championing women in the state of Wisconsin. Christine was honored at the Women’s Council’s 40th Anniversary Celebration with a commendation from Governor Tony Evers with gratitude for service, advocacy, and dedication to the Wisconsin Women’s Council.



Christine Lidbury with Council Chair
Denise Gaumer Hutchison at 40th
Anniversary Celebration in March 2023.

Interns

Caitlyn Kolstermann (Spring Semester 2022)

Erin Wruk (Spring Semester 2023)

The Women’s Council benefited from over 300 hours of staff time using student interns, hired as LTEs. The interns during this reporting period gained academic credit for their work, along with wages and valuable job experience. Both interns during this reporting period connected with the Women’s Council through a partnership with the [University of Wisconsin-Madison Gender and Women’s Studies Department’s](#) internship program. The Women’s Council follows DOA’s policies and procedures related to Affirmative Action; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and Equal Employment Opportunities.

Council Affairs

Council Meetings

During the reporting period, the Women’s Council held 11 meetings:

September 22, 2021 • December 1, 2021 • March 2, 2022 • June 1, 2022 •
 December 8, 2022 • January 27, 2023 • February 24, 2023 •
 March 23, 2023 • April 28, 2023 • May 26, 2023 • June 23, 2023

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, meetings throughout 2021 and 2022 were held virtually. At the start of 2023, the Women’s Council changed its meeting schedule from longer quarterly meetings to monthly one-hour meetings, with special in-person two-hour meetings held in March and June 2023.

The meeting on March 23, 2023, was held in-person at the [Executive Residence](#) (WERF) in advance of the Women’s Council’s 40th Anniversary celebration event. The Women’s Council is grateful to hosts First Lady Kathy Evers and the WERF team for providing such a lovely location for a productive in-person Council meeting and celebratory event.

The meeting on June 23, 2023, was held in-person at the [UW-Stevens Point Schmeckle Reserve](#) Visitor’s Center. Council Vice-Chair, Nerissa Nelson, coordinated a wonderful panel of women leaders from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, community-based organizations, and elected officials representing Central Wisconsin (in and around Stevens Point and Wausau). The panelists shared information about the work they and their organizations are doing and any initiatives, issues, or barriers regarding women and girls in the Central Wisconsin region, related to their work, such as domestic violence, funding constraints, reproductive health, cultural awareness, pandemic impacts and response, development of future women leaders and public officials, wealth gaps and wealth equity, access to affordable childcare, etc.



Wisconsin Women’s Council meeting on June 23, 2023, at the UW-Stevens Point Schmeckle Reserve Visitor’s Center with guest panelists.

Front row (L to R): Denise Gaumer Hutchison, Mayor Katie Rosenberg, Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez, Monica Lo, Jane Graham Jennings.

Back row (L to R): Dr. Lyna Matesi, Sarah Ross, Nerissa Nelson, Rachel Fernandez, Representative Katrina Shankland, Dr. Jolene Bowman, Jenifer Cole.

Presentations to the Council

During the reporting period, the following individuals and organizations provided presentations to the Women's Council:

Mai Zong Vue, President, [The Hmong Institute](#) Board of Directors
Launch of Hmong Women's Story Cloth Quilt Project – September 22, 2021

Caitlyn Kolstermann, Intern, Women's Council
Spring Semester Projects and Reports – March 2, 2022

Kathy Blumenfeld, Secretary-designee, State of Wisconsin Department of Administration
Highlighting Leadership Approaches and Women's Issues – June 1, 2022

Jessie Leonard, Director of Established Business Program and Services, [WBDC](#)
About the Women's Business Development Center (WBDC) and Certifying Women-Owned Businesses in Wisconsin – May 26, 2023

Dr. Lyna Matesi, Director, [UW-Stevens Point Center for Women's Equity, Development, and Leadership](#)

Sarah Ross, Director, [Women's Fund of Portage County](#)

State Representative Katrina Shankland, [Assembly District 71](#), Stevens Point

Mayor Katie Rosenberg, [City of Wausau](#)

Jane Graham Jennings, Executive Director, [The Women's Community](#) (Wausau)

Monica Lo, Southeast Asian Advocate for Hmong Program, The Women's Community (Wausau)

Women's Issues in Central Wisconsin Panel and Roundtable Discussion – June 23, 2023

In addition, Women's Council Executive Director Jenifer Cole provided the following presentations on behalf of the Council:

March 14, 2023 – [Wisconsin Primary Healthcare Association](#), *Legislative Process 101: The State Budget*

March 16, 2023 – DOA IDEAS Committee Lunch & Learn Webinar, *Spotlight on Women's History Month*

March 27, 2023 – DOA Agency-wide Town Hall, *About the Wisconsin Women's Council*

June 9, 2023 – [Madison Community Foundation-A Fund for Women](#), *Spotlight on the Women's Council*



Current Council member Carrie Richard with former Council member Sen. Janis Ringhand (retd.) at the 40th Anniversary celebration, March 2023.



40th Anniversary celebration guests Susie Reed and Regina Estrada with current Council member Amanda Medina-Roddy and her mother, Yolanda Medina, March 2023.



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