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# The Political Leadership of Women of Color in Massachusetts: Uneven Progress Amid Historic Advances

Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston

Gaston Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston

William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston

Institute for Asian American Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

Institute for New England Native American Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

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# Fact Sheet

May 2019

McCormack Graduate School's Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy | Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy | William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture | Institute for Asian American Studies | Institute for New England Native American Studies

## The Political Leadership of Women of Color in Massachusetts: Uneven Progress Amid Historic Advances

### Highlights

- Several breakthrough victories over the past few years signal a notable shift in historically limited representation by women of color in key elected leadership positions in Massachusetts and in the City of Boston.
- The election of Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley and Suffolk District Attorney Rachael Rollins reflect groundbreaking candidacies.
- More women of color serve as state legislators than ever before.
- The trend of increased electoral leadership of women of color in municipal government suggests continued expansion of representation at the local level.
- Even with gains made, progress is uneven given persistent underrepresentation at most levels of government.

Since the 2015 release of *Profiles in Leadership: Women of Color Elected to Office in Massachusetts* which documented the electoral leadership of 94 women of color who had ever served in office in Massachusetts, at least 34 women of color have been elected to office, reflecting a 36% increase in the past four years.

### The Local Level: Increased Representation

- The majority of women of color ever elected in the Commonwealth have been elected to municipal office.
- According to currently available data, since 1972, 61 women of color have been elected to school committee and 53 to local governing bodies (such as city councils and select boards).
- Most women of color elected locally who have held two offices have served first on school committee, followed by city council.
- Six of 13 Boston City Councilors are women of color – the most women ever to serve on the Council.
- Of nine female mayors currently in office, one is a woman of color; Framingham Mayor Yvonne Spicer is the first African-American woman to be popularly elected as mayor in the Commonwealth.

### Racial and Ethnic Diversity of Women in MA

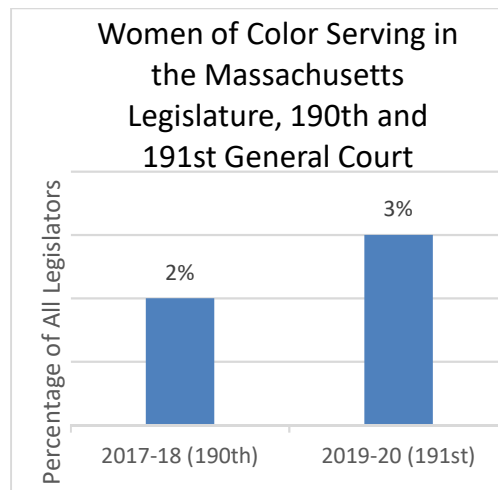
According to 2017 population estimates, more than one of four women in Massachusetts is racially and/or ethnically diverse:

- 28% of 3,529,454 females are racially and/or ethnically diverse
  - 313,248 female residents are Hispanic White
  - 310,085 are Black or African American\*
  - 246,793 are Asian\*
  - 16,321 are American Indian or Alaska Native\*
  - 3,594 are Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander\*
  - 83,815 identify with two or more races\*  
\*including Hispanic and non-Hispanic

The statewide diversity among Massachusetts women is not reflected in governing bodies across the Commonwealth, even as some communities such as Boston and Chelsea stand out due to increased representation by women of color on their City Council and School Committee, respectively.

## The Massachusetts Legislature: Increased Representation in House, One Woman of Color in Senate

- More women of color are serving in the legislature than ever before: one as State Senator and five as State Representatives.
- Senator Chang-Díaz is the longest-serving woman of color in the legislature.
- Racial and ethnic diversity reflected in current House membership includes the first Korean American (Rep. Robinson), the first Vietnamese-American (Rep. Nguyen), and the first Cape Verdean-American woman (Rep. Miranda) elected to the legislature.
- Women of color comprise 3% of all legislators, reflecting a slight uptick from the previous session.



## Top Offices and Congressional Delegation: Historic Election of First Black Woman to Congress, Statewide Representation Gap

- The first woman of color elected from MA to Congress, U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley (MA-7<sup>th</sup>), was elected in 2018.
- No woman of color has ever been elected to statewide constitutional office.

## District Attorneys, Governor’s Councilors, and Sheriffs: Limited Representation in Key Judicial and Law Enforcement Roles

- Of the 11 elected District Attorneys, three are women and one is a woman of color – Suffolk DA Rachael Rollins.
- Four of eight Governor’s Councilors are women but no woman of color has ever been elected to the Council.
- Of fourteen elected Sheriffs in Massachusetts counties, none are women of color. The first female and woman of color elected Sheriff in the Commonwealth was Andrea Cabral in 2004.

Women of Color, Massachusetts House and Senate (191 <sup>st</sup> General Court)		
Legislator	District	Year First Elected
State Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz	2 <sup>nd</sup> Suffolk	2008
State Representative Chynah Tyler	7th Suffolk	2017
State Representative Nika Elugardo	15th Suffolk	2019
State Representative Liz Miranda	5th Suffolk	2019
State Representative Tram Nguyen	18th Essex	2019
State Representative Maria Duaine Robinson	6th Middlesex	2019

Women of Color, Key Elected Leadership Positions, Massachusetts, 2019 and to Date			
	Total # of Officeholders	# of Women of Color in Office (2019)	# of Women of Color Elected to Date
U.S. Senate	2	0	0
U.S. House of Representatives	9	1	1
Constitutional Offices [Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer]	6	0	0
MA Senate	40	1	3
MA House of Representatives	160	5	18
MA Legislature	200	6	20*
District Attorneys	11	1	1
Governor’s Councilors	8	0	0
Sheriffs	14	0	1

\* Linda Dorcena Forry is the only woman of color to have served in both the MA House and the MA Senate.

## Sources

Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies, UMass Boston and Women's Pipeline for Change. *Profiles in Leadership: Women of Color Elected to Office in Massachusetts*. September 2015.

[http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp\\_pubs/27](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs/27).

Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy and Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, UMass Boston. *Latino Political Leadership in Massachusetts 2019*. Fact Sheet. June.

Data also collected from the Massachusetts Legislature (<https://malegislature.gov>), Massachusetts Secretary of State ([www.sec.state.ma.us](http://www.sec.state.ma.us)), as well as town and city websites by researchers from the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture, Institute for Asian American Studies, and Institute for New England Native American Studies. Additional data sources, primarily for past officeholders, include: *Latino Politics in Massachusetts: Struggles, Strategies and Prospects* by Carol Hardy-Fanta, Jeffrey Gerson (New York: Routledge, 2002), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), Women's Pipeline for Change, EMERGE MA, MA Women's Political Caucus, LIPPI at the Women's Fund of Western MA.

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017 released June 2018.

## Women of Color: Definitional Considerations

While commonly utilized by scholars and advocates, the term "women of color" in this fact sheet is intended to be inclusive and broad even though it remains controversial in part because there is no consensus about its meaning or its use. In current discourse, it often reflects an intention of empowering women who are underrepresented, invisible, disenfranchised, marginalized, and/or who self-identify as having a diverse racial, ethnic, and/or immigrant background. Yet there are limitations and drawbacks to the term as it may not be recognized and/or embraced by all women of diverse backgrounds.

Currently there is no standardized or government-provided data on the sex, gender identity, or the racial/ethnic backgrounds of elected officials. Therefore, data for *Profiles in Leadership: Women of Color Elected to Office in Massachusetts* and this fact sheet were collected primarily through publicly available, credible sources of information such as biographies and campaign websites when self-identification of racial/ethnic background was not possible through direct contact with the elected official.

*The Massachusetts Representation Project: Diverse Leadership for a Diverse Commonwealth* at UMass Boston will offer a data portal based on self-identified information provided directly by elected officials.

## The Massachusetts Representation Project: Diverse Leadership for a Diverse Commonwealth

*Racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in political leadership is vital to a healthy democracy. Yet information about the backgrounds of Massachusetts' elected officials - from School Committee to Congress - is not easy to access. The searchable public web portal under development at UMass Boston will change that.*

A collaborative project of:

**McCormack Graduate School's Center for Women in  
Politics and Public Policy**

**Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community  
Development and Public Policy**

**William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of  
Black Culture**

**Institute for Asian American Studies**

**Institute for New England Native American Studies**

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Lead Research Assistant for *The Political Leadership of Women of Color in Massachusetts*: Brian Beauregard

Research Assistants: Ijeoma Anyanwu, Bianca Ortiz-Wythe, Yvonne Gomes-Santos, Shauno Lo, and Tyler Jean-Louis

Research and Policy Director, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy: Christa Kelleher  
Interim Director, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy: Laurie Nsiah-Jefferson

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**McCormack Graduate School's Center for Women in  
Politics and Public Policy at UMass Boston**

Christa.Kelleher@umb.edu | 617.287.5530

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