

# STATE OF PAY



How State Legislator Salaries  
Contribute to Poor Representation



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our democracy was founded on the principle that it is of, for, and by the people. And “the people” were white, wealthy, male landowners. Since inception, the vast majority of decision-making power has lived in the hands of the privileged few. Institutional barriers rooted in racism, misogyny, and classism have been perpetuated by this system, keeping women, immigrants, and people of color from actively participating in our democracy.

While some progress has been made in realizing this founding principle of our democracy, significant barriers to full participation still remain. And it is the voters, absent representation that truly comprehends their policy needs, who suffer. In this report, New American Leaders examines one of the primary barriers for full representation and inclusion in our democracy: the financial commitments it takes to run, win, and lead in elected office.

Following an extensive data review, creation of multiple case studies, and interviews with New American state legislators, **State of Pay 2021** presents five key policy recommendations that not only would help close the representation gap for New Americans and other underrepresented groups, but also improve representation and policies for all communities.

## 1. Make state legislatures full time

The needs of our communities are year-round, not part-time. However, many states continue to use the antiquated system of part-time legislatures to create, debate, and sign into law critical legislation.

The nature of part-time legislatures means that they are too often rushed, inefficient, and prone to outside interference given a lack of time and resources. With a condensed timeline, legislators do not have the ability to review bills in depth, often with little to no staff assistance, while also addressing constituent needs. This leaves communities underserved and legislators unaware of potential unintended consequences or open to the influence of outside groups presenting only one side of the argument. By switching to a full-time system, legislators will be better equipped to address the needs of their communities while also engaging in deep review and debate of legislative issues.

## 2. Create independent compensation committees

While increasing legislator pay enjoys bipartisan support from lawmakers across states, the general public does not typically support salary increases for lawmakers. What many do not realize is that most state legislatures are unpaid or salaried well below the standard cost of living, leaving only the wealthy with the ability to run for office. This system too often excludes New Americans, people of color, working-class individuals, and caretakers, leaving critical insights out of our legislative process.

The creation of an independent compensation committee would allow for an objective review of lawmaker salaries, opening the door to higher wages and allowing more people to run for office.

## 3. Provide funds for full-time staff support

In many states, legislators do not have adequate funding — if any at all — for staff support. This oftentimes requires legislators to pay low wages, rely solely on unpaid interns or volunteers, and have no year-round support. While some states like Arizona provide shared staff for each political party's caucus, capacity is spread thin, meaning legislators are still tasked with managing the vast majority of constituency services, community outreach, legislative analysis, and other critical tasks. This again leaves them vulnerable to outside interests and lobbyists.

Even in states like Michigan, which provides over \$180,000 for state senators to use for staff support, the diverse geographic areas and communities mean that legislators are forced to prioritize communities, leaving others without the representation and assistance needed. By investing in legislative staff, states can not only improve the flow of legislative sessions and quality of bills introduced, but also the ability to serve all communities and constituents.

#### 4. Address the need for childcare

The lack of affordable and reliable childcare is often a barrier, especially for women interested in running for and serving in elected office. Without federally funded childcare, states should allow candidates to use campaign funding to pay for childcare. Once they are in office, states should follow Alaska's example by having a reliable and affordable option for childcare immediately nearby. This opens the door for more parents and caregivers to serve in elected office.

#### 5. Invest in candidate recruitment and training

When New Americans are elected into office, they create systemic change. The case studies presented in this report illustrate just a few of the ways New American experiences influence policies and break down barriers to others participating in our democracy.

But if this systemic change is to continue, then organizations like New American Leaders, elected leaders, and political parties must invest in building a bench of other New American, women, and BIPOC candidates who are empowered to share their stories and equipped with the skills needed to run successful campaigns. Once they are on the campaign trail, community groups must also show their support by supporting first-time candidates with their fundraising efforts. Supporting candidates throughout their leadership journey is critical to not only getting them into office, but to creating lasting change.

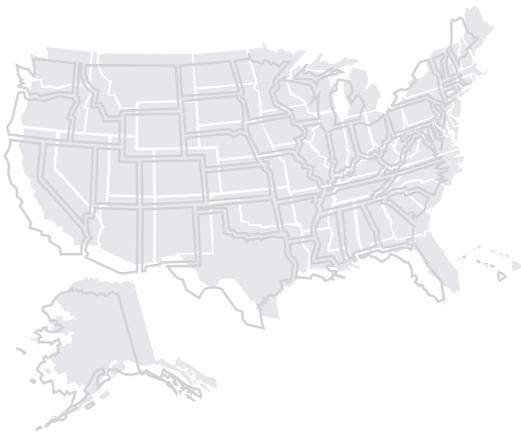
**We know that by applying these policy suggestions and investing in underrepresented communities, we will inspire and empower the leaders our communities have been waiting for. With new leaders in office, the remaining barriers implemented by the white and wealthy establishment can be dismantled, creating a democracy that lives up to the founding principle of being of, for, and by *all* people.**



# STATE BY STATE APPROACH

**The average citizen would be surprised to know that the 50 different states have 50 different approaches to state legislatures.**

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) breaks down the many types of state legislatures into full-time with large staff, two-thirds time with intermediate staff, and part-time with small staff.<sup>1</sup> For the latter two categories, legislators typically need other sources of income. Some states



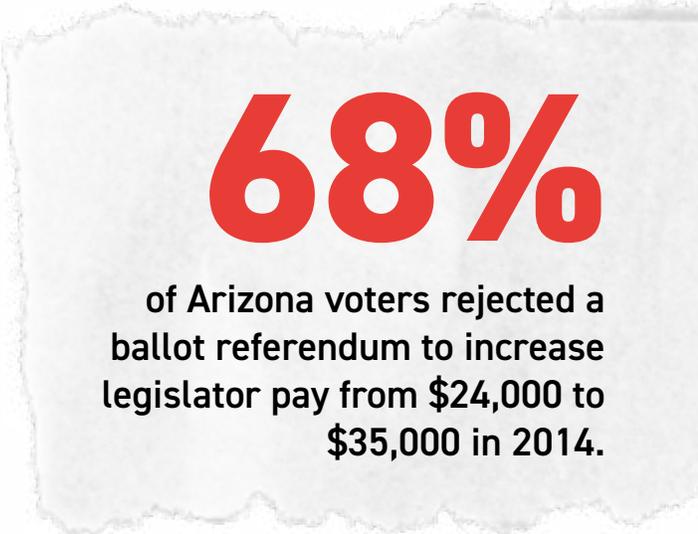
## STATE BY STATE APPROACH

also allow for *per diem* payments to cover travel and lodging.<sup>2</sup> New Mexico does not pay its legislators a salary, although it allows for a *per diem*.

Currently, only four states have full-time legislatures and receive adequate compensation and staffing to allow lawmakers to focus solely on their legislative duties: California, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania. By adequate, it means in these states lawmakers are paid enough to make a living without requiring a second source of income.

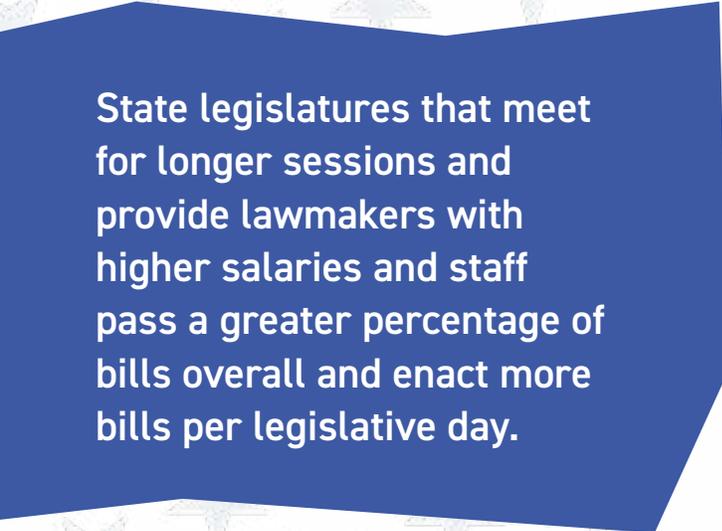
A study conducted by Peeverill Squire, a political science professor at the University of Missouri and an expert on state legislatures, found that state legislatures that meet for longer sessions and provide lawmakers with higher salaries and staff pass a greater percentage of bills overall and enact

more bills per legislative day. In addition, they have more contact with constituents and are more readily able to address their concerns.



# 68%

**of Arizona voters rejected a ballot referendum to increase legislator pay from \$24,000 to \$35,000 in 2014.**



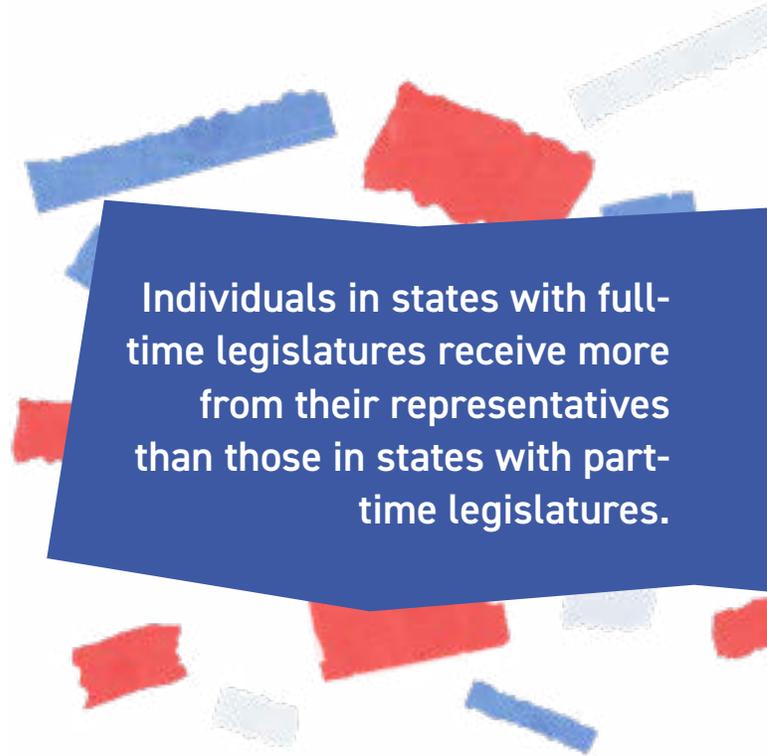
**State legislatures that meet for longer sessions and provide lawmakers with higher salaries and staff pass a greater percentage of bills overall and enact more bills per legislative day.**

Despite these benefits, the topic of legislator pay does not poll well with the public. In 2014, the Arizona state legislature put forward a ballot referendum to increase legislator pay from \$24,000 to \$35,000. The referendum was rejected by nearly 68 percent of voters. As Americans face increasing economic uncertainty, state legislatures are reducing or freezing their legislative salaries. Colorado also passed a bipartisan bill to suspend a scheduled legislator pay increase.<sup>3</sup> Illinois, a state that accounts for cost-of-living adjustment, allocated zero dollars to fund it. In Washington, lawmakers are prohibited from turning down the salary increase approved by an independent panel.<sup>4</sup> Instead, individual lawmakers

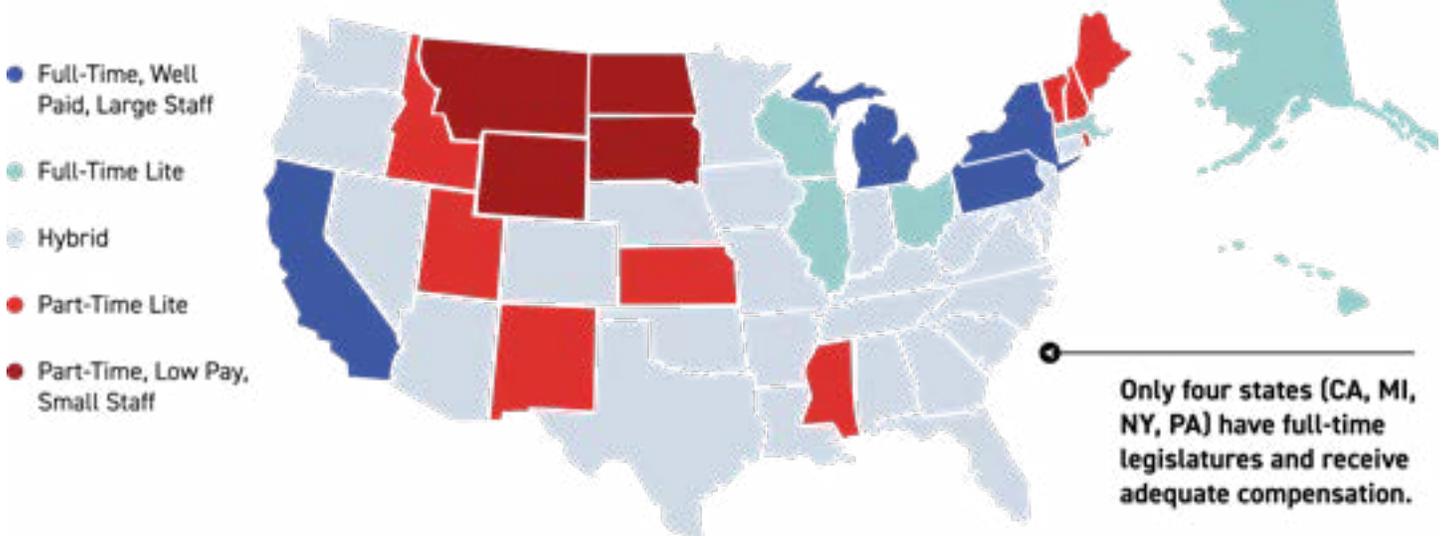
## STATE BY STATE APPROACH

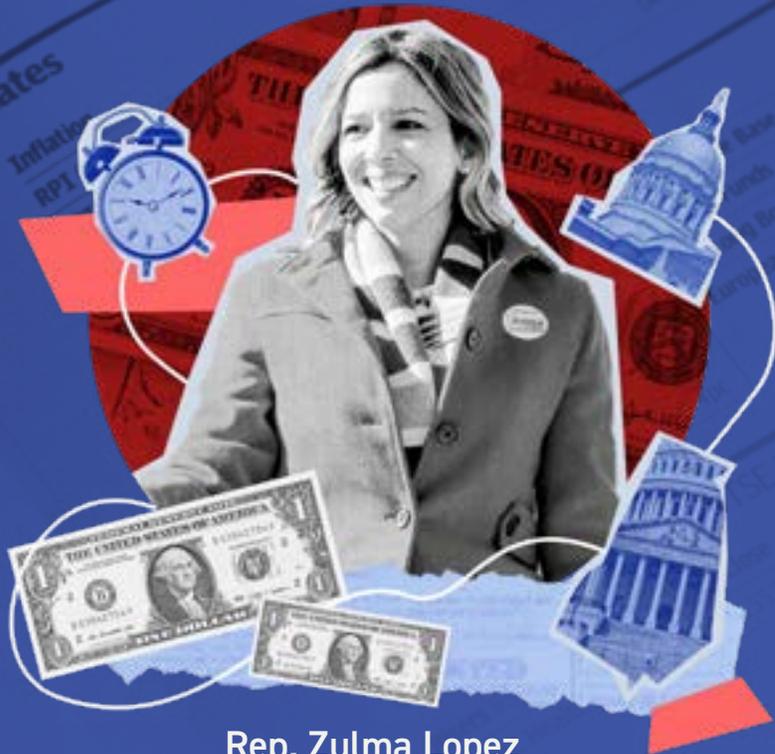
have opted to donate the \$4,113 salary increase to nonprofit and religious institutions, regardless of their personal need, given political pressure to gain favor within their districts and avoid public disapproval of salary increases.

With the level of legislator pay and the number of days in session varying from state to state, residents from one state to another share very few commonalities in their representation. But despite these discrepant legislative models, one thing is clear — individuals in states with full-time legislatures receive more from their representatives than those in states with part-time legislatures. Ultimately, a resident in New York or Michigan can reasonably expect far more time to work on passing policies than a resident in Georgia or Florida.



### Types Of Legislatures Across The 50 States





Rep. Zulma Lopez

# GEORGIA



**Georgia is a part-time legislature or what is also referred to as a citizen legislature, with members receiving a salary of just \$17,342 plus a per diem.**

In 2018, Georgia commissioned a compensation study for constitutional officers and members of the General Assembly, an initiative led by the Republican-controlled legislature. The study recommended increases in salaries for constitutional officers, legislators, and the Speaker of the House,

President Pro Tempore, and Speaker Pro Tempore to, “attract high quality candidates for those officers and assembly members who serve.”<sup>5</sup>

Georgia lawmakers received a pay raise in 1999, taking the annual salary from \$10,000 per year to \$16,200 per year. Georgia code also allows for cost-of-living adjustments when they are appropriated statewide. This provision brought the salary up to \$17,342 in 2007, the highest it has been in the state of Georgia. Based on population growth and cost-of-living adjustments, the 2018 study recommended raising legislator pay to \$29,908 per year. This increase would have put Georgia in line with Florida. Like Georgia, Florida is a part-time legislature,

though lawmakers in Florida have a 60-day legislative session compared to the 40-day legislative session in Georgia. In these part-time legislature states, lawmakers report spending between half and two-thirds of their time on legislative work, often without the adequate staff support. In Georgia, lawmakers are given an allowance of \$7,000 per year to pay for staff, communications, and other administrative expenses. The nominal pay and additional resources required to invest in constituent support requires most lawmakers to have a second source of income outside the legislature.

In 2019, a bipartisan bill filed in the Georgia Senate would have brought the annual salary of Georgia lawmakers in line with Georgia’s median household income, currently at \$58,400.<sup>6</sup> Senate Bill 81 would have tied legislator pay to the median income, allowing for it to automatically adjust without legislative review. A similar model is used in Colorado, where legislative pay is tied to the pay

### Georgia’s History Of Legislator Pay



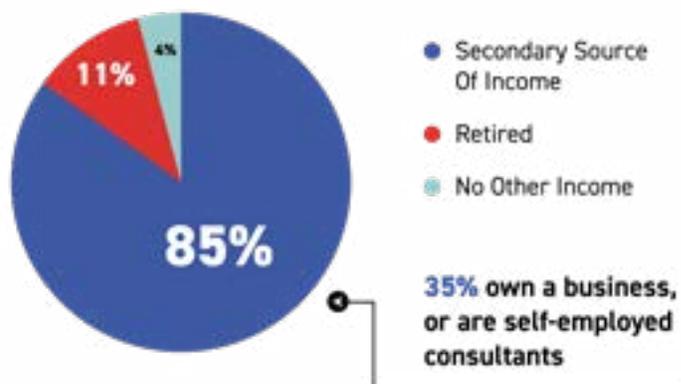
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of county judges. However, the bipartisan effort to raise legislator pay quickly reversed course the following year. In 2020, Republican co-sponsor Senator Jeff Mullis, citing economic concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic, retracted his position on legislator pay and introduced a bill to reduce legislator pay by 14 percent. Senate Bill 416 passed by a nearly partisan split, taking legislator pay from \$17,342 to \$15,600 – not quite a 14 percent reduction, but a reduction nonetheless.<sup>7</sup> The reversal is not surprising, given the unfavorable public opinion on legislator pay, especially as state budgets face significant cuts during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the fact remains that on such limited salaries, legislators in states like Georgia and Florida often require a second source of income. Nearly 85 percent of the members serving in the Georgia House of Representatives report a secondary source of income from another job. The remaining 11 percent are retired and 4 percent of lawmakers report having

no other income. About 35 percent of representatives own a business or are self-employed consultants. Other prevalent industries include real estate, finance, and insurance. Of the 180 lawmakers, only one legislator is a clinical social worker and only one lawmaker currently teaches at a university.<sup>8</sup> In the Georgia State Senate, approximately 66 percent of lawmakers are employed as consultants, business executives, attorneys, or are self-employed.<sup>9</sup>

### Georgia House Of Representatives Reporting Other Income



### Industries That Georgia State Senators Are Employed In



**66%**

of Georgia State Senate members are consultants, business executives, attorneys, or are self-employed.



# SAM PARK

**When Georgia Representative Sam Park decided to run for state house in 2016, he left his job as a bankruptcy attorney to run his campaign.**

The financial uncertainty caused Park anxiety, but he managed to survive financially by living with his family. After Park was elected to the Georgia General Assembly, he experienced a gap in employment until he was hired as general counsel for an HIV-crisis nonprofit organization in 2019. In that position, his employer provides him with the flexibility required for him to serve in the legislature, including non-traditional hours and the ability to work remotely. Park believes that he was given this opportunity because his employer views his experience as a lawmaker as an asset to the organization. This is not an uncommon belief among other state legislators who take external work. However, it opens the door to a host of other complications, not the least of which is bribery, unethical lobbying, and other forms of corruption. Yet, as Representative Park's situation highlights, the reality of living off of a part-time legislative salary is too often an unrealistic one.

Prior to his job with the nonprofit, Park was only bringing home \$1,000 per month from his legislative salary.

“I grew up poor so I’m used to being poor. I know how to stretch a dollar,” he said. But he also recognizes that for working-class Georgians, the financial barrier to running and serving in the legislature is too much to overcome without structural changes.

Park also notes that though Georgia is a part-time legislature in name, serving in the legislature requires providing constituent services year-round. For the most part, his constituents do not realize the legislature only meets part-time, and their immediate

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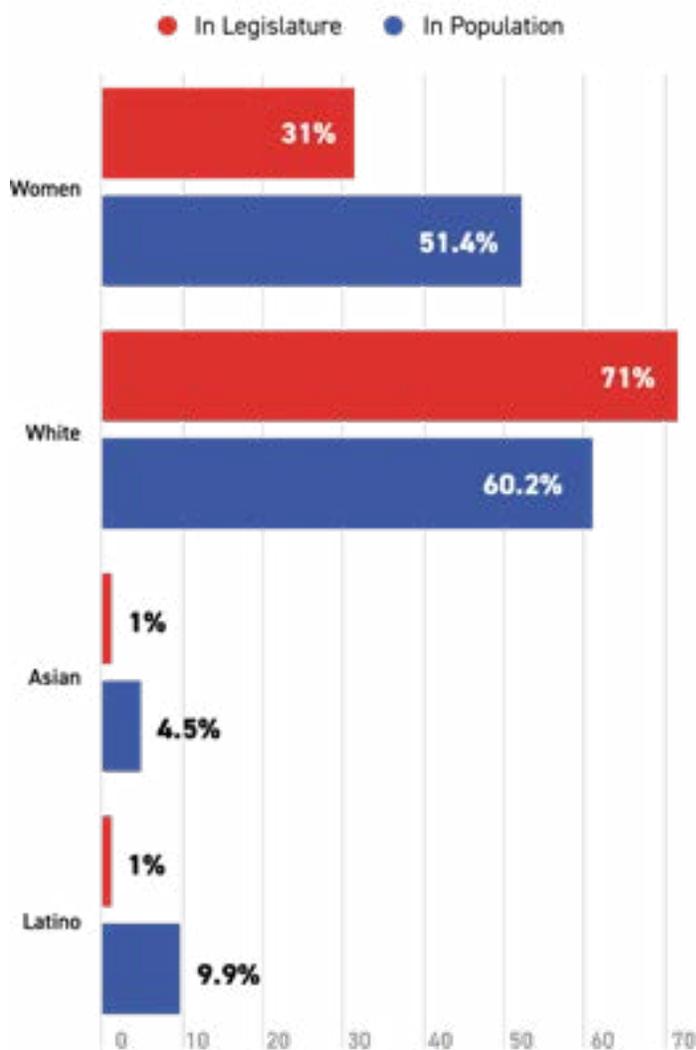
needs require attention outside of the legislative session. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has required lawmakers to provide public health information, assist constituents with unemployment claims, and push for immediate action on utility moratoriums and other financial relief. In a more typical off-session, like many legislators, Park must support the 50,000 constituents he represents in addition to writing legislation, conducting town halls, and engaging in electoral politics. The \$7,000 per year allotted to hire staff is not enough for lawmakers to retain support outside the 40-day legislative session. Once again, this lack of funding opens the door to corruption, allowing lobbyists and outside interests to provide their services to overwhelmed legislators in a quid pro quo arrangement.



The 2021 class of lawmakers in Georgia includes lawyers, doctors, and public health professionals, but noticeably absent are workers from Georgia’s top industries such as agriculture, film, manufacturing, and hospitality. Georgia’s current legislative make up is neither reflective of the industries nor the demographics of the state. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, of the 236 members that make up the Georgia General Assembly, 71 percent are white, though only 60.2 percent of Georgia’s population is white.<sup>10</sup> The gender gap shows even greater disparity – while women make-up 51.4 percent of the population, they only comprise 31 percent of the legislature. Notably, in the last five years, Georgia has seen significant gains in electing more women. In 2005, women represented only 23 percent of the legislature. The legislature has also gained a handful of New American elected officials, though AAPI elected officials still only make up 1 percent of the legislature and Latino lawmakers only 1 percent as well, despite making up 4.5 and 9.9 percent of the population, respectively.

Even with these shockingly low levels of representation, the number of New American and BIPOC elected officials has increased within the last five years. In January 2021, four New American elected officials joined the legislature. Three of the four newly elected legislators identify as AAPI, and the fourth newly elected representative identifies as Latina. Dr. Michelle Au became the first Chinese

### Representation In Georgia's Legislature



American elected to the Georgia General Assembly in November 2020. Au is taking a leave of absence during the time in which the Georgia legislature is in session. Au is an anesthesiologist and recognizes that her specialty allows her the kind of flexibility that other physicians do not have. Even so, Au took

a significant reduction in pay; and as a result of her reduced hours, she no longer qualifies for her employer-provided health insurance.

Keeping her job has enabled Au to better understand how laws passed at the state level impact her patients. “There is a value to being plugged into your occupation and having the on-the-ground perspective. You get to see how laws are carried out and how they impact real life people. On the Senate side, my colleagues are retired from practicing medicine.”

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Dr. Michelle Au



Rep. Sam Park



Rep. Dotie Joseph

# FLORIDA



**In 2018, the Tampa Bay Times examined the makeup of the Florida legislature, another “part-time” legislative body, by industry.<sup>11</sup>**

Of the 154 sitting legislators, nearly half were lawyers or chief executive officers. When compared to Florida's workforce, the legislature did not represent the industries most prevalent in the state. Florida residents are more likely to be employed in top industries as salespeople, clerks, restaurant

servers, or administrative assistants. For the Florida legislature to reflect the job sectors held by Floridians, 27 legislators would have administrative jobs, 20 legislators would have jobs in the insurance or real estate industries, and 17 legislators would work in food prep services. Instead, among Florida's

lawmakers, zero have administrative jobs, only five work in insurance or real estate, and none work in food services. The report concluded that those who serve in the Florida legislature are generally self-employed, retired, or wealthy.

## FLORIDA CASE STUDY



# ANNA ESKAMANI

**Shortly after Rep. Anna Eskamani launched her campaign for the Florida state legislature in 2017, she resigned from her job as senior director of public affairs and communications for Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida, leaving her without a source of income for a short time.**

"I knew that running for office, I needed a job that could give me more flexibility and not have any political connections," Eskamani stated. "I didn't want to give my opposition a way to attack me or the organization I was employed with so a lot of thought went into how do I protect my village, how do I maintain economic security, and what does that look like for me?"

In Florida, where legislators are paid \$29,697 per year, Eskamani recognized that even if she won, she would need to find a second source of income. To prepare for this, she juggled both her campaign and job search during her initial run for office, eventually securing a full-time role in the nonprofit sector.

Now in her second term in the legislature, she has kept her role at the nonprofit, noting that it provides flexibility in both hours and work location, something that she cites as critical to continuing her work in elected office, despite the intense workload.

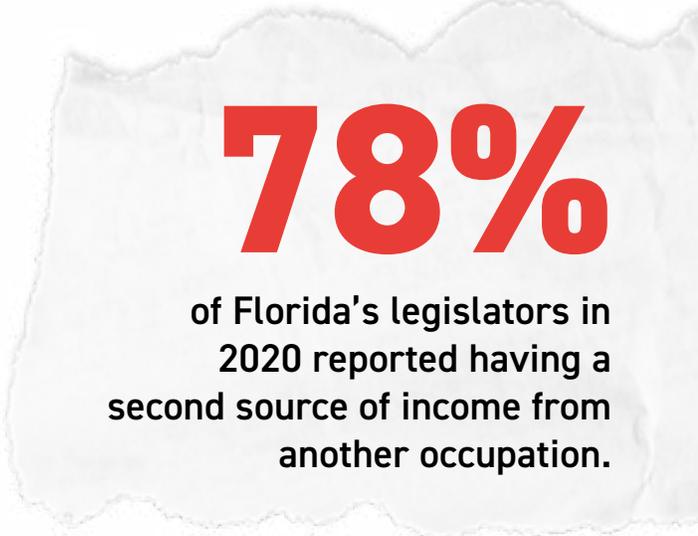
“There are times where you have to choose between a really important event in your district and something for your job,” she said. “There have been moments where I am on the House floor and I am

also on a work call. I have one headphone in and I am watching the floor to make sure I am not missing anything while also listening to the work call.”

Like Georgia, Florida’s part-time legislature is in name only. Eskamani still has to work the entire year to provide constituent services, write legislation, and make sure she is actively engaging with her community on key issues and events. Florida is a low wage state, and the average wage in the state hovers around \$50,000. Raising legislator salary to that average would lessen the need for a second job and open the door for Florida legislators to devote more time to constituent services and legislative action.

In 2020, nearly 78 percent of Florida’s legislators reported having a second source of income from another occupation.<sup>12</sup> Of the remaining 22 percent, nearly seven percent report drawing income from social security, retirement, or investment income. The remaining 15 percent of Florida’s legislature reported only one source of income: the \$29,697 salary paid to sitting lawmakers per year.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of the composition of the legislature, Florida is nearly the same as Georgia when it comes to gender parity. In 2015, women made up 25 percent of the body; that number increased to



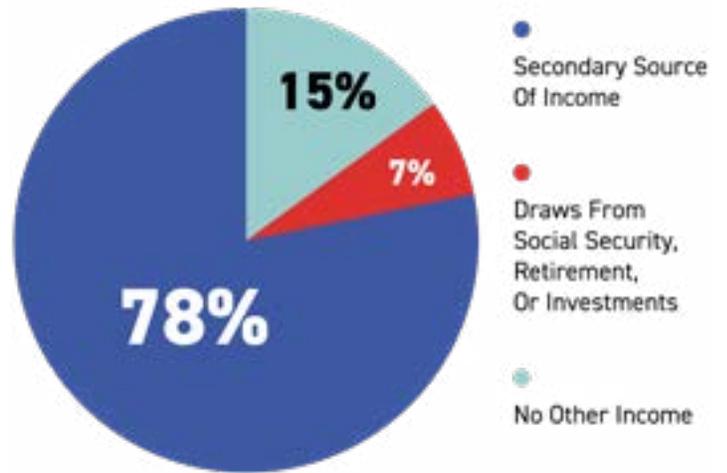
# 78%

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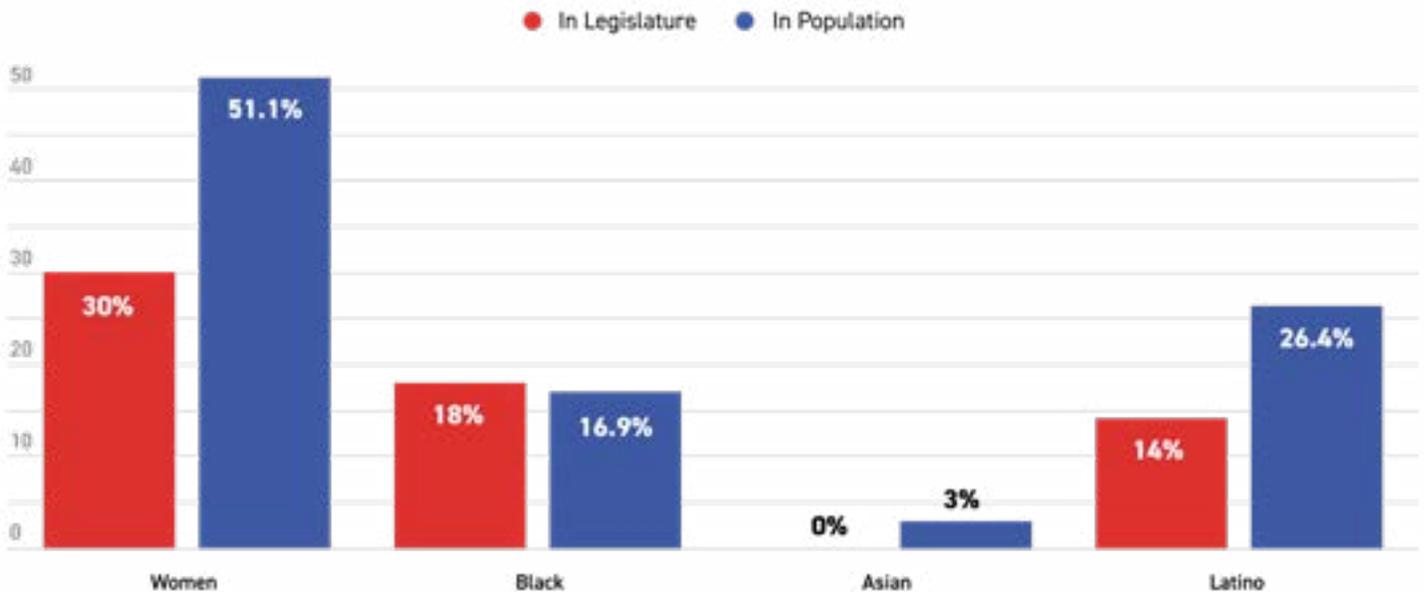
30 percent in 2020. Florida’s racial representation is unique in that the percentage of Black elected officials is reflective of the greater population. In 2020, Black elected officials made up 18 percent of the Florida legislature compared to the general population of 16.9 percent.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Latino elected officials made up only 14 percent of the legislature, though the Latino population in Florida is 26.4 percent. There are no AAPI elected officials in Florida’s legislature.

Still, when it comes to addressing legislator pay or moving to a full-time legislature, there is currently no political momentum toward a different structure in Florida.

### Florida Legislators’ Sources Of Income



### Representation In Florida’s Legislature





# NEW YORK

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas



**On the opposite end of the spectrum, legislatures such as New York and Michigan operate on a full-time schedule and provide salaries that enable sitting lawmakers to serve in the legislature without drawing secondary sources of income.**

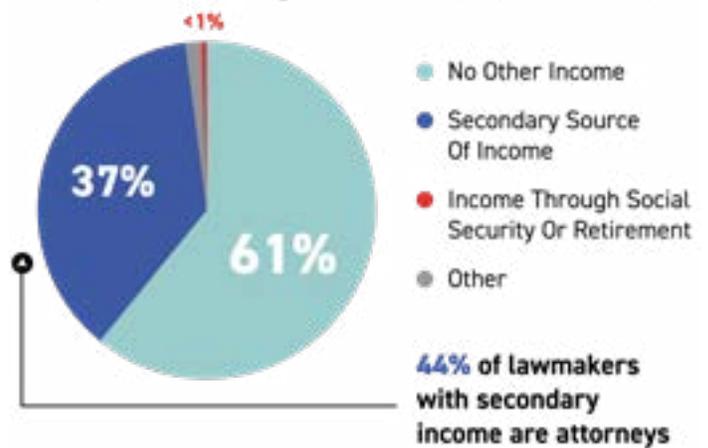
Nearly 61 percent of legislators in the New York Assembly report only one source of income: the \$110,000 per year salary earned through their service

to the legislature.<sup>15</sup> Of the remaining lawmakers, less than one percent report income earned through social security or retirement. The 37 percent of lawmakers that do report a second source of income are employed at law firms, universities, real estate firms, and other business consulting firms. In fact, nearly 44 percent of lawmakers with secondary income are practicing attorneys.

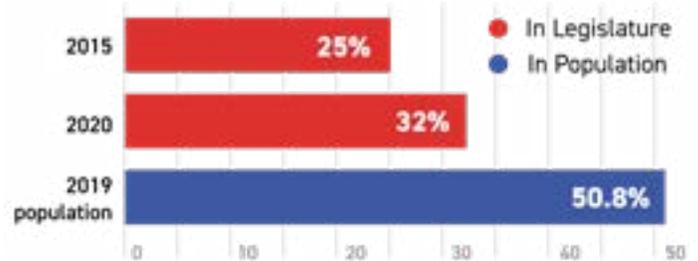
Even with a full-time legislature, the New York Assembly fares about the same as the Georgia legislature when it comes to gender parity. According to NCSL, women made up only 32 percent of the legislature in 2020, a seven percent increase from the 2015 legislature.

However, since 2015, the New York Assembly has increased legislative salaries. In 2018, the New York Compensation Committee, comprised of current and former comptrollers, decided on three years of raises. The first raise brought the base salary of \$79,500 up to \$110,000 in 2019 with salaries scheduled to increase to \$120,000 in 2020 and to \$130,000 in 2021.<sup>16</sup> The approved salary increase was the first increase in legislator pay since 1999. In addition to the pay raise, the committee passed a new policy that limits the amount of private income lawmakers can earn to 15 percent of their public salary. However, the New York Supreme Court subsequently ruled the private income restriction unconstitutional. The increases originally set for 2020 and 2021 were also put on hold for at least the next four years as New York similarly faces a state budget crisis as a result of the pandemic.

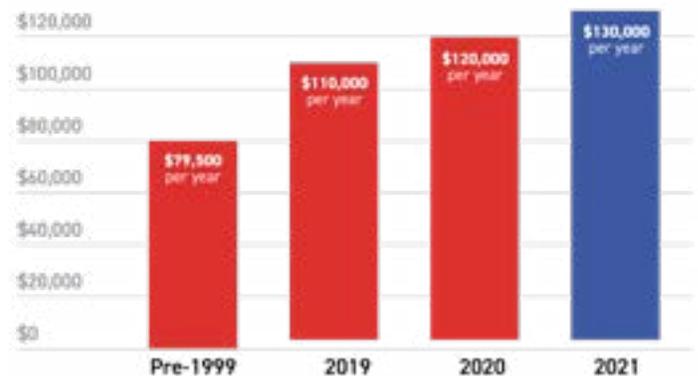
### New York Legislators' Other Income



### Women Representation In New York's Legislature



### New York Legislative Salary Increases





# MARCELA MITAYNES

**Even with the delay in the second and third pay raises, the initial boost has allowed diverse new candidates to run, win, and lead in elected office.**

Knowing she would have a full-time job with commensurate pay made it possible for New York State Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes to run. An Indigenous, Peruvian American woman of color with an associate degree in accounting from a community college, Mitaynes does not fit the typical profile of a state legislator. Unlike her peers with careers in law or real estate, she worked as a tenant organizer and community advocate. If Mitaynes had to rely on outside employment to remain in the Assembly, she would be at a severe disadvantage, but the full-time, paid position means she can bring her unique and much-needed expertise on housing and immigration justice to the policy table.



Rep. Mari Manoogian

# MICHIGAN



**Lawmakers in Michigan have the fourth-highest salary in the nation, taking in \$71,685 per year.**

Recent raises, implemented in 2001 and 2002, increased legislative salaries by 35.8 percent in 2001 and then another 3.9 percent in 2002. These increases were recommended by the seven members of Michigan's State Officers Compensation Commission. After the raises were implemented, public backlash caused a change in law; the commission can no longer act on its own, but

must receive legislative approval for any changes in compensation.<sup>17</sup> The 2002 statewide ballot referendum to limit the authority of the commission passed with 72.3 percent of voters supporting the initiative. In 2009, the commission cut legislator pay by 10 percent. Since this reduction, the salary for lawmakers has remained at the current \$71,685 per year with little or no efforts to restore salaries to their previously approved levels.

# 72.3%

**of Michigan voters supported a 2002 ballot referendum to limit the authority of Michigan's Compensation Commission.**



## STEPHANIE CHANG

### MICHIGAN CASE STUDY

**In addition to a full-time salary, lawmakers receive a budget to hire staff with different allowances depending on leadership position, legislative chamber, and party affiliation.**

Democratic Senator Stephanie Chang receives over \$180,000 a year to hire support and an additional \$55,000 for other legislative expenses. Even so, Chang says it is hard to adequately represent the people in her district. Chang has a background in social work, influencing her office's decision to invest heavily in constituent services. Chang says, "For me, having a social work mindset is helpful for my

constituent casework. We make constituent services a priority for our office, and I hire social workers as part of my legislative staff.”

When Chang decided to run for office, she was in graduate school earning her Master’s in Social Work. Once she graduated, instead of seeking employment, she devoted all of her time to her election campaign. “If I had been single at the time, I don’t think it would have been financially possible to run for office. I had to rely on the second source of income from my spouse.”

In addition to adapting to a one-income household, Chang had to raise over \$100,000 for her first race. After she was elected to the Michigan legislature, she opted not to seek a second job. The Michigan legislature is not required to report income sources, making it hard to tell whether or not lawmakers retain secondary jobs. Chang says anecdotally that most of the members do not have other jobs, but they come from a diverse range of industries, including farming, education, finance, government, law enforcement, health, law, and nonprofit.



# DARRIN CAMILLERI

**Prior to being elected to the Michigan state legislature, Rep. Darrin Camilleri, son of Maltese and Mexican immigrants, was a high school social studies teacher.**

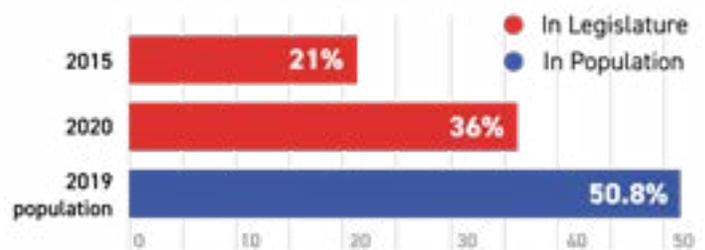
After he won his Democratic primary, Camilleri left his job and dedicated all of his time to his campaign. Between August 2016 and January 2017, he had no source of income. Camilleri said he blew through all of his savings. “I knew I was draining my bank account and that was hard. But at the same time, I was 24 and I had roommates. I didn’t have a family to take care of and it would be harder for someone who does have to take into account other people.”

After Camilleri was elected, he opted to serve in the legislature full time instead of also teaching. He says there are a total of 12 educators in the Michigan Assembly, but only one currently teaches and only part time. Camilleri also recognizes that what he earns in the state legislature as a full-time lawmaker is likely higher than his earning potential as a high school teacher.

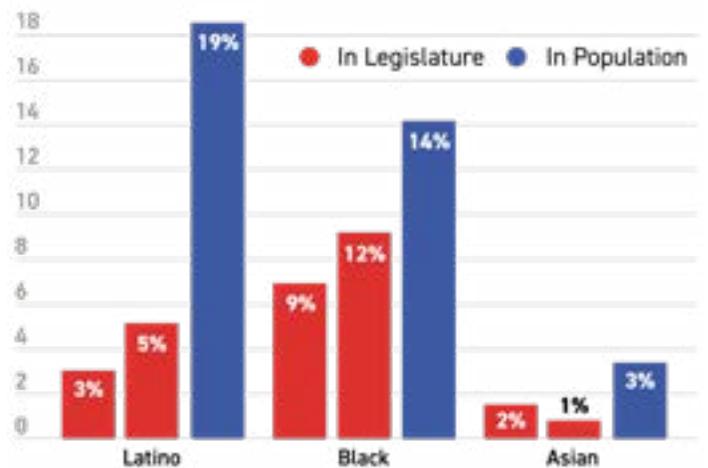


In terms of legislative makeup, Michigan fares slightly better than most states when it comes to gender parity. Women currently represent 36 percent of the legislature, a 15-point gain from 2015. When broken down by party, the Democratic caucus has achieved gender parity in both the House and the Senate. The Michigan legislature has also seen slight gains in electing more Black and Latino lawmakers. In 2015, Black lawmakers represented 9 percent of the legislature compared to 12 percent in 2020. Latino lawmakers now make up 5 percent of the legislature compared to 3 percent in 2015. Three New American lawmakers joined the Michigan legislature in 2021, two of whom identify as South Asian and one who is half-Latina. Still, Black and AAPI lawmakers remain slightly underrepresented as a share of Michigan's total population. According to Census Bureau estimates 14.1 percent of Michigan residents are Black and 3.4 percent identify as Asian Pacific Islander.

## Gender Parity In Michigan's Legislature

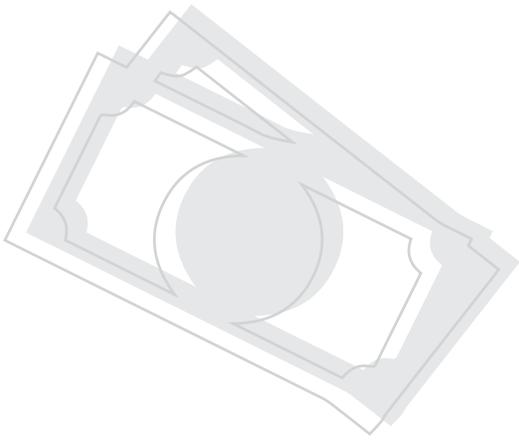


## Representation In Michigan's Legislature





# **IMPACT ON ECONOMIC & INDUSTRY DIVERSITY**



**While state legislatures are slowly making gains when it comes to gender parity and racial representation, legislatures are either lagging, or not gaining any traction altogether, when it comes to industry and economic diversity.**

The structural prohibitions that delineate allowable campaign activity make it nearly impossible to retain full-time employment while campaigning

## IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRY DIVERSITY

effectively, especially for seats with two-year terms. Once elected, lawmakers continue to struggle with serving and maintaining full-time employment. The flexibility required by legislatures is simply not the type of flexibility that industries like hospitality, administrative, social services, or educational fields can offer. Workers in industries that traditionally require more structured hours also struggle with access to the capital that is required to run for office in the first place.

In addition, lawmakers must account for time away from home, which creates more financial burden, especially when including temporary housing for those who cannot commute to state capitals during legislative sessions. For attorneys, doctors, consultants, or business owners, their networks and employment flexibility equip them with a built-in financial advantage that others may not have. In the worst case scenario, part-time legislators dependent on outside income may end up in jobs where they encounter conflicts of interest or expectations to peddle their influence on behalf of employers or their employers' clients.

Another challenge in building more economically diverse legislative bodies is the lack of data available to build a case for what a representative democracy might look like. While groups like the National Conference of State Legislatures track educational attainment and generation (age), there are no comprehensive studies that provide information on



Once elected, lawmakers continue to struggle with serving and maintaining full-time employment.

the industries or incomes of legislative bodies. In the last five years, the number of lawmakers who hold less than a bachelor's degree has decreased in most states.<sup>18</sup> When it comes to generational diversity, baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) are overrepresented in most states. And only in the last year has a study been done to record the immigrant background of all state legislators.

# BABY BOOMERS

(people born between 1946 and 1964) are overrepresented in most states.

## IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRY DIVERSITY

The methodology used to obtain information on industry and secondary sources of income require the examination of personal financial statements for individual lawmakers in each state. The self-reported information is not required for all states, including the Michigan legislature. Even with the personal financial statements, lawmakers are not required to disclose the amount of income earned per year, though the reporting of the income source provides a snapshot that reflects the lack of diversity in industries.

While gender parity and racial and ethnic diversity matter, so does having legislators whose class and industry background reflect the breadth of the state's and our country's population. In the absence of working class perspectives, or those from industries on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic for example, policymaking will often fail to meet the nuance and needs of a diverse population. This cycle continues in Congress, where many of the sitting members started their political careers in state legislatures. Their advancement to Congress is easier than that of working-class candidates because of structural barriers meant to exclude immigrants, BIPOC, and working class people. The fact that the majority of Congressional members are wealthy reinforces the need for reform at the early stage of the pipeline.

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**Ranjeev Puri swearing in**



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## CREATE INDEPENDENT COMPENSATION COMMITTEES

While increasing legislator pay enjoys bipartisan support from lawmakers across states, the general public does not respond positively to increasing salaries for lawmakers. In an effort to reduce public distrust, legislatures should create independent compensation committees and consider introducing legislative pay increases only with approval by the independent committee.

As a second step, legislative bodies might also consider a ballot referendum with details on why the change is needed to ensure public support for any changes recommended by the committee.

Currently, 19 states have independent compensation commissions to study, and in some states, set the salaries for lawmakers.

STATE	STRUCTURE	SALARY	PREVIOUS	YEAR CHANGE	PER DIEM	STRUCTURE
<b>Georgia</b>	40 non-consecutive days	(\$15,600)	\$17,342	2020	\$173/session day	Changes must be passed through both chambers through a vote and signed by the Governor
<b>Florida</b>	60 days	\$29,697	\$18,000	1985	\$152/day for 50 days for Senators, 60 days for Representatives	Changes must be passed through both chambers through a vote and signed by the Governor;  <i>*changes in Florida salary from 1985 to current are based on state employee compensation changes, not legislative changes</i>
<b>Michigan</b>	Full-time	(\$71,685)	\$79,650	2009	No per diem; \$10,800/year for expenses	Changes must be approved by independent commission and passed through ballot referendum
<b>New York</b>	Full-time	\$110,000	\$79,500	2019	\$61/day for non-overnight stays; \$176/day for overnight stays	Changes must be approved by independent commission

However, if legislatures opt to include ballot referenda, lawmakers and advocates must provide a clear case for increasing legislator salary. In 2014, the Arizona state legislature put forward a ballot referendum to increase legislator pay from \$24,000 to \$35,000. The referendum was rejected by nearly

68 percent of voters. The public must understand that the part-time legislature model creates structural barriers and does not work in favor of the public. The inhibitive nature of serving in a part-time legislature excludes many people from being able to run and serve in elected office.

## PROVIDE FUNDS FOR FULL-TIME STAFF SUPPORT

In addition to raising salaries for lawmakers, legislators cite a lack of staff support as a primary challenge. In the Georgia legislature, lawmakers are allotted \$7,000 per year to hire staff support, a situation that is seen in states across the country. This also necessitates accepting low wages for those who have an interest in working for an administration, and thus the same questions of who can afford to work for these low wages applies. The limited funds available to lawmakers prohibit legislators from retaining staff year-round and has multiple consequences. For one, it limits who is in the pipeline to run, since staff can be successors to their principals. It also increases the risk for corruption, as in the absence of qualified staff, legislators may rely on policy recommendations from lobbyists and special interests.

Though lawmakers in part-time legislatures only meet for a set number of days for legislative session, legislators are still required to provide constituent services throughout the year. Lawmakers are left with either raising additional campaign funds to retain staff, or opt to having staff for a portion of the year. Even in states like Michigan, where the allotment is over \$180,000 for senators, having enough staff to represent senate districts with over 250,000 constituents is challenging.

Providing more funds for staff is also a solution that would be more politically palatable to the general public and would not have to undergo the same legislative procedures as pay increases for lawmakers.



The limited funds available to lawmakers... increases the risk for corruption, as in the absence of qualified staff, legislators may rely on policy recommendations from lobbyists and special interests.

## ADDRESS CHILDCARE NEEDS

While legislatures across the country have experienced gains in the representation of women, Nevada is the lone state that has achieved gender parity within their House and Senate assemblies. The next state closest to achieving the same gender parity as Nevada is the state of Colorado, where women make up 44 percent of the legislature.

Lawmakers cite childcare needs as a barrier to both running for office and serving in office. Michigan Senator Stephanie Chang is a mother to two young children. Chang says she timed her second pregnancy to align with Michigan's summer break.

Georgia State Senator Michelle Au has three school-aged children. During her campaign, Au blocked out time for her children and restricted her campaign hours. This proved to be even more challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Georgia Rep. Sam Park recognized that he may not have decided to run for office if he had children.

### Gender Parity in State Legislatures

TOP TEN STATES	2015	2020	BOTTOM TEN STATES	2015	2020
<b>Nevada</b>	33%	54%	<b>West Virginia</b>	15%	13.4%
<b>Colorado</b>	41%	44%	<b>Tennessee</b>	18%	15.2%
<b>Oregon</b>	31%	42.2%	<b>Wyoming</b>	13%	15.6%
<b>Washington</b>	33%	40.8%	<b>Alabama</b>	14%	15.7%
<b>Vermont</b>	41%	40.6%	<b>Mississippi</b>	17%	16.1%
<b>Maryland</b>	31%	39.9%	<b>South Carolina</b>	14%	16.5%
<b>Arizona</b>	36%	38.9%	<b>Louisiana</b>	12%	18.1%
<b>Maine</b>	29%	37.6%	<b>Oklahoma</b>	13%	21.5%
<b>Illinois</b>	32%	37.3%	<b>North Dakota</b>	19%	22%
<b>Rhode Island</b>	27%	37.2%	<b>Delaware</b>	24%	24.2%

*Data from Center for American Women and Politics and National State Conference of State Legislators*

## Campaign Funds for Childcare

Allowing candidates to use campaign funds for childcare would alleviate both financial and time constraints for candidates with children. Currently, 22 states allow state-level candidates to use campaign funds for childcare, either through legislative action or rulings made by state ethics and finance commissions. According to the Vote Mama Foundation, 74 percent of funds used for childcare by federal candidates have been used by women.<sup>19</sup> On the state legislative side, more than 60 state-level candidates have used campaign funds for childcare.

# 74%

**of funds used for childcare by federal candidates have been used by women.**

Currently, Georgia, Florida, and Michigan do not have rulings or legislation that enables candidates to use campaign funds for childcare. New York passed legislation in 2019 to codify the elections board ruling to allow the use of campaign funds for childcare.

## Provide Childcare During Legislative Session

While state legislatures have introduced and, in some cases, have passed legislation to provide childcare for working families, only one state currently provides childcare at the legislature: Alaska. Alaska created an unsubsidized childcare center next door to the state capitol for both lawmakers and staffers. The state capital, Juneau, is geographically isolated and faces even higher childcare shortages compared to the national average. Access to childcare at state legislatures would reduce the barriers women (and some men) face when it comes to serving in elected office. In addition to access to childcare on the premises, states should consider providing subsidies for childcare for elected officials and their staffers.

**Only one state currently provides childcare at the legislature: Alaska. Twenty-two states have approved campaign funds to be used for childcare (AL, AR, CA, CO, CT, IL, KS, KY, LA, MD, MN, MT, NH, NJ, NY, RI, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI, WV).**

### INVEST IN CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

While policy changes may diversify state legislatures, recruitment, training, and ongoing support for candidates is crucial to building legislatures that are more reflective of the population. Training programs reduce the barriers candidates face when making the decision to run for office. In addition to training programs, first-time candidates need support when it comes to fundraising efforts. Rep. Dotie Joseph, Senator Stephanie Chang, and Senator Michelle Au respectively raised over six figures for their elections. For candidates who may not have expansive networks, raising the amount of money required to win elections is an uphill battle.

Programs such as New American Leaders are essential to taking our legislative system out of the

18th century with our founding fathers and building equitable political representation for all communities.

In addition to focusing on creating gender and racial parity, groups must also invest more intentionally in recruiting and supporting working class candidates, who face additional barriers as they fundraise and serve in part-time legislatures. Industry diversity and economic diversity need to be tracked and prioritized in the same manner as gender, race, and ethnicity. A more comprehensive, intersectional approach to recruitment, legislator pay, and other democratic reforms is required for a more representative democracy.



**Groups must also invest more intentionally in recruiting and supporting working-class candidates, who face additional barriers as they fundraise and serve in part-time legislatures**

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New American Leaders is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Our mission is to empower New Americans to run, win, and lead, creating an inclusive democracy that works for and represents everyone. We do this through trainings, building partnerships with elected officials to pursue inclusive policies, researching solutions to break down systemic barriers, and honoring the contributions of New American elected officials.

Our affiliated 501(c)(4) organization, the New American Leaders Action Fund, is building a democracy that represents and includes all people by engaging new voters, supporting New Americans as they run for office and expanding civic engagement.



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