

2024

REPRESENTATION IN STATE LEGISLATURES 2024

A data-driven study of legislators, motherhood, and caregiving.

photo: State Senator Jennifer Denise Carroll Foy and child

politics of parenthood

by



Vote mama FOUNDATION

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introduction

state legislatures and motherhood:

why representation matters



By the time American women are 45 years old, 85% are mothers.¹ Yet only 25.3% of our state legislators are moms, and fewer than 8% are moms with children under the age of 18. However, this is a monumental increase from our first Politics of Parenthood report, which found that only 5.3% of state legislators were moms with minor children in 2022.

This is a 48.6% increase in the representation of moms of minor children.

The number of women who have given birth while serving in office has also grown; in 2022, only 12 state legislators across the country gave birth while serving, and this year we have found that 30 legislators were pregnant or gave birth from 2023 to February 2024, over double the amount.

Despite the encouraging growth, mothers still comprise an underexplored population that is critical to understand, not just as a subpopulation of women, but as a distinct population in its own right that is integral to a well-functioning government and achieving gender equity in politics. Research shows that moms bring a unique perspective to legislative bodies. At the federal level, members of Congress who are moms with children under 18 are more likely to sponsor legislation that addresses issues specific to parents and children compared to those who have adult children or none at all.²

Moms know the challenges that women, kids, and working families face at a visceral level, yet they are systematically kept out of the conversation, out of office, and out of power. In order to change policy, we must have a government representative of the people; this means electing more young people, working-class folks, women, people of color, and parents of minors. The United States Congress passed only 27 bills through both chambers in 2023.³ Meanwhile, at least 19,000 bills passed by state legislatures in 2023 became law.⁴

The U.S. is behind other industrialized countries when it comes to family-friendly legislation. We have the highest maternal mortality rate in the industrialized world. Childcare costs more than rent in every state.⁵ We are the only country besides Papua New Guinea to have no federal paid family leave,⁶ and 27 states have no paid leave policy.⁷ Legislators legislate on their lived experience.

introduction

state legislatures and motherhood:

With such a wide range of legislation being proposed and enacted, it is critical that the perspectives and lived experiences of mothers of minor children are involved in the decision-making process.

In addition to passing a wide variety of legislation across the country, state legislative positions are often vital stepping stones for politicians seeking higher office. Nearly half of the 118th Congress is made up of former state legislators.

⁸ Electing more moms to state legislatures can create a pipeline for qualified, passionate mamas seeking higher office across the political spectrum. Having the voices of mamas at all levels of government is crucial for representing the needs of parents and caregivers everywhere.

Despite the critical role that state legislatures play in our democracy, running and serving in them can be expensive and time-consuming. As of 2024, only four states pay legislators a livable salary - Pennsylvania, Michigan, California, and New York. Legislators serving in states with part-time or hybrid legislatures often require other sources of income to make ends meet. Most state legislators are either unpaid or paid below their state's standard cost of living, and many do not have funding to hire staff. South Carolina state legislators earn \$10,400 per year. New Hampshire state legislators earn just \$200 for a two-year term. New Mexico state legislators receive no salary at all. In addition to getting more moms of minors into these legislative bodies, it is equally important to identify the barriers that prevent them from staying in office when the work involves long hours and little pay.

By changing the policymakers, we can change the policies, but first, we must change the political system.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A THREE-PART REPORT ON KEY AREAS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE (UNDER) REPRESENTATION OF MOMS IN STATE LEGISLATURES:

Part 1: representation

Focuses on quantifying the representation of moms of minor children; how many moms are serving in state legislatures, and who they are.

Part 2: state by state

Provides a state-by-state overview of which states have proportional representation and how many moms of minors are required to reach it.

Part 3: attrition and barriers

Addresses attrition; we identify the barriers that legislators face while serving and provide recommendations for modernizing state legislatures.

about vote mama foundation

Vote Mama Foundation is the leading source of research and analysis about the political participation of mothers in the United States. We work towards gender equity by naming and dismantling the barriers mothers face running for and serving in office, normalizing mothers of young children in office, and enabling legislators to pass *truly* family-friendly policies. Vote Mama Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.



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Photo left: Vote Mama Staff with candidates and supporters;

Photo middle: child wearing Vote Mama merchandise photographed by Ashley Comans;

Photo right: Vote Mama Foundation's Chief Program Officer speaking

our data

In 2022, Vote Mama Foundation launched Politics of Parenthood, a research series focused on the political participation of mothers in the United States. The series' first report sought to answer a seemingly simple question: how many mothers with kids under 18 are serving in state legislatures? With no other organization collecting information on the representation of parents in office, this question proved difficult to answer. Vote Mama Foundation has finally addressed this gap in research. With Politics of Parenthood, we have created the first comprehensive data set addressing this gap in political research. This report is the second installment of the state legislature Politics of Parenthood report, with data to reflect the parenthood status of women and nonbinary state legislators sworn in by February 2024. In addition to collecting the parenthood status and child age range of all cisgender and transgender women as well as nonbinary legislators, Vote Mama Foundation has collected data on other demographic characteristics, including ethnicity, age, occupation, and sexual orientation. Our goal is to provide a nuanced analysis of how parenthood intersects with other identities and to provide an intersectional look at caregiving and serving in state legislatures.

our methodology

We collected demographic data on 2,427 women and nonbinary state legislators from a mixture of historical and contemporary public records that include statements of self-identification by the officeholder. Common sources include Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP), Ballotpedia, Vote Smart, and Victory Institute. Other sources that were critical to our research include state legislature websites, candidate websites, and legislators' public social media accounts. While we relied heavily on publicly available data, we used a multiple-source verification process for coding. We cross-referenced candidate biographies, social media, and news articles for each demographic characteristic researched.

We are confident that our data is as comprehensive as possible. Still, our data largely depends on the extensive monitoring of news and social media, and builds on the work of other organizations. Because this data relies on publicly available information, we suspect that the number of mothers and caregivers is higher than publicly reported.

Who is included in the dataset?

Vote Mama Foundation has collected demographic information not just on mothers serving in state legislatures, but all state legislators who use she/her or they/them pronouns. Mamas are cis and trans women with biological children, foster children, stepchildren, and formally or informally adopted children under the age of 18. While we are defining a mama as a woman or nonbinary legislator with children under the age of 18, we acknowledge that not all nonbinary genderqueer, two-spirit, or gender non-conforming individuals align their identities with the experience of womanhood. Still, we find it important to identify caregivers and parents from underrepresented groups beyond the gender binary. In this report, we also refer to mamas interchangeably as moms or mothers of minor children.

What is proportional representation?

For the purposes of this report, representativeness is evaluated in terms of the national population. We consider proportional representation to be achieved when the share of a demographic in state legislatures is similar to that of the adult population in the United States. Unless specifically noted otherwise, all population-level statistics in this report are derived from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimate Public Use Microdata. It is important to note that this definition is not intended to be a measure of ideal representation.

key findings

Among the 7,386 state legislators in the United States, 582 are moms with children under 18; 196 additional moms of minors have been elected since our 2022 report. According to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, adult women who live with related kids under 18 comprise 18.2% of the adult population. As of February 2024, we found that only 7.9% of all state legislators are women with minor children. In order to achieve proportional representation, Americans need to elect 763 more moms with young children to state legislatures.

AS OF FEBRUARY 2024:

7.9%

of all state legislators are moms of minors

48.6%

increase in representation of moms of minors between 2022-2024

763

more moms with kids under 18 are needed to achieve proportional representation in state legislatures

2.3%

of all state legislators are women of color with children under 18

0.5%

of all state legislators are LGBTQ+ moms of minors

3rd

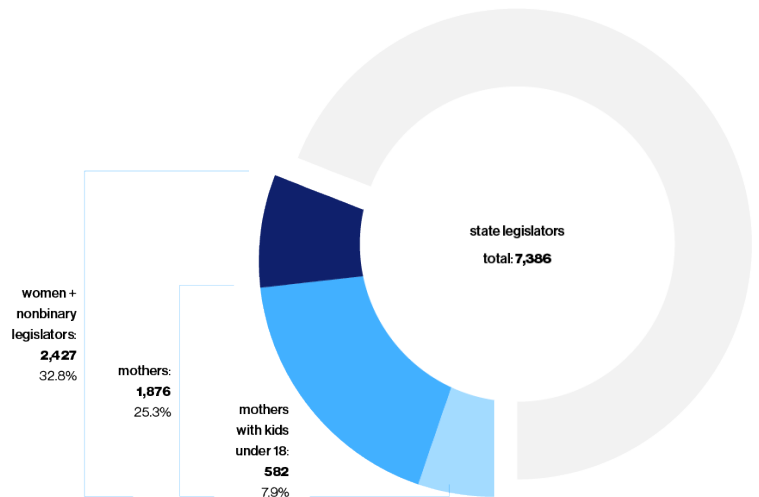
most cited category for women leaving state legislative office was caregiving, family obligations, or work environment, behind running for higher office and retirement



overview:

demographics of moms of minors

Gender and politics research has uncovered important inequalities among legislators when it comes to identities like gender, race, and class, but all too often, parenthood is overlooked. Nearly 4 million American women give birth each year, yet only 30 women serving in state legislatures gave birth between 2023 and 2024.¹⁰ For women in underrepresented groups, these numbers are even smaller; of the 30, just six are women of color, and only four identify as LGBTQ+. And none are Gen Z, whose oldest members are 27 years old - the same as the average age of first-time moms in the United States.¹¹ There is a reason the U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate in the industrialized world, and Black women are nearly 3 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women.¹²

**Figure 1: Moms as % of Legislators**

- Women total: 2427 (32.8% of all legislators)
- Moms total: 1876 (25.3% of all legislators)
- Moms of Minors: 582 (7.9% of all legislators)

Making mothers' voices heard in politics is critical for representing the interests of children and families, no matter what side of the aisle. Both Democrat and Republican moms of minors are underrepresented across the country, and their experiences as parents intersect with other aspects of identity. In Tennessee, the only two mothers of young children in the legislature are London Lamar and Charlane Oliver, who Oliver says are in a "triple minority" of young, Black, mothers. Senator Lamar is currently the youngest member in Tennessee State Senate history,¹³ and Vote Mama Foundation has found that she is one of only three Black women who gave birth while serving in state legislatures in 2023. Senators Lamar and Oliver are advocates of issues relating to childcare, maternal healthcare, and pre-k expansion. In Georgia, Representative Lauren Daniel, a mother of four, recently spoke on the floor about being the youngest member of the Georgia legislature. Frequently bringing her infant son to session, she introduced bipartisan legislation in the 2024 session that would expand the childcare tax credit.¹⁴

582

moms of minors are serving in state legislatures

7.9%

of all state legislators are moms of minors

25.3%

of all state legislators are moms of children of any age

“First of all, no one like me has ever chaired the Economic Development and Housing Committee in the Vermont State Senate. I'm the first woman of color in history to serve in the State Senate and to anyone's recollection, there has never even been a woman who's chaired the Economic Development committee, let alone a woman of color, let alone a woman who is now pregnant twice in her time as chair. It shouldn't be as uncommon as it is because when people who have provided care, who think about the invisible care economy, sit at the head of the table, the questions are different. The people speaking are different. The agenda is very different.”¹⁸

- Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale (D - VT)

state overview: child age

Our data shows that the age range of legislators' youngest child is negatively correlated with representation; in other words, the representation of moms of minor children starts to increase as their children get older.

While moms of minors are underrepresented as a whole, moms of children under the age of six are even less represented in our state legislatures; of the 582 moms of minors in our dataset, only 124 are moms of children under the age of six. Moms of children under the age of six comprise only 1.7% of all state legislators in the U.S.

1.7%
of all state legislators in the US are moms of minors under the age of 6

30
women were pregnant or gave birth between 2023 and February 2024 across all state legislatures

77.3%
of all women state legislators are moms of children of any age

photo: State Representative Samantha Sencer-Mura (MN - 63A) with her child

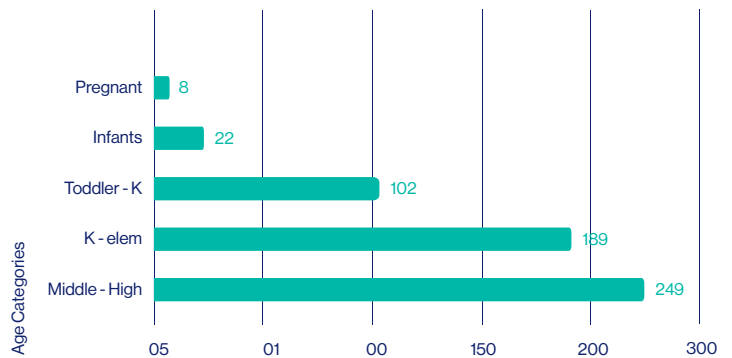


Figure 2: Moms of Minors - Age Categories¹⁵

- Pregnant 8
- Infants 22
- Toddler - Kindergarten 102
- Kindergarten - Elementary 189
- Middle - High 249



state overview:

sexuality and gender diversity

Our 2024 data has identified 127 LGBTQ+ women and nonbinary state legislators, 35 of whom are parents of minor children. This is less than .5% of all state legislators in the United States. While these numbers are small, we see an increase in LGBTQ+ representation compared to our 2022 report.

35

LGBTQ+ parents have minor children; nearly half have been elected since 2022

0.5%

of all state legislators in the US are LGBTQ+ moms of minors

28

states have zero LGBTQ+ moms of minor children state legislators

44.8%

of all women and nonbinary LGBTQ+ legislators are parents of children of any age

6%

of all moms of minors in our dataset are members of the LGBTQ+ community

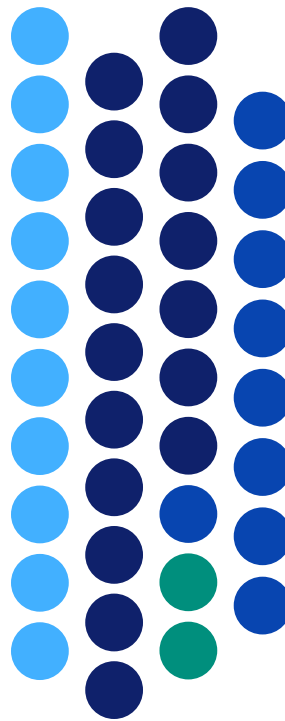


Figure 3:
Sexual Orientation of the 35
LGBTQ+ parents of minor children

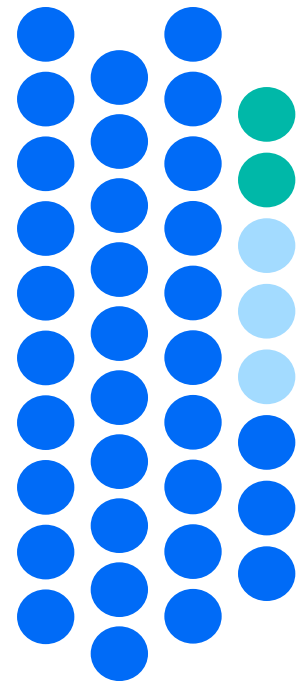
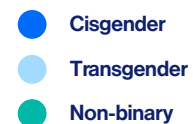
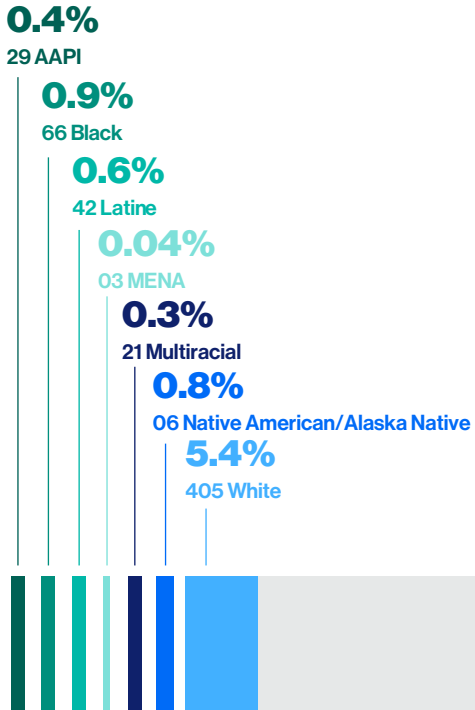


Figure 4:
Gender Identity of the 35 LGBTQ+
Parents of Minor Children



state overview:

racial representation and parenthood



2.3%
of all state legislators are women of color with children under the age of 18

<1%
of all state legislators in each racial category are moms of minors, except for white women

7386
state legislators

Figure 5: Moms of minors by race, as % of all 7386 legislators

29.1%
of all women and nonbinary moms of minor children are women of color

23.6%
of women of color serving as state legislators are moms of minor children

30
Of the 30 moms who have been pregnant or gave birth in the last year, only 6 were women of color.

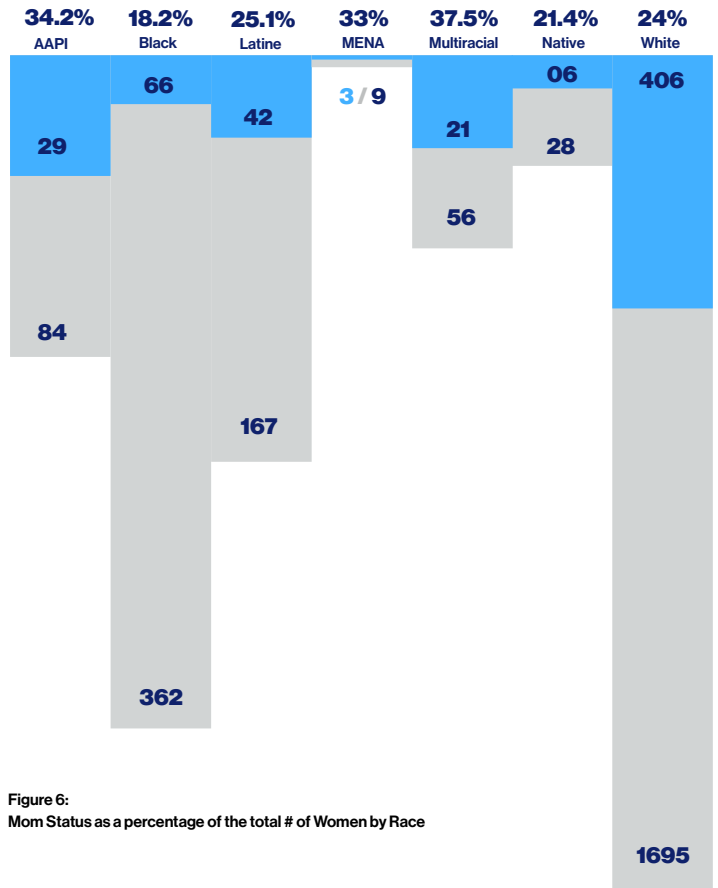


Figure 6: Mom Status as a percentage of the total # of Women by Race

“When I was elected as State Senator in 2022, I was appalled to learn that I was the only woman legislator with young children in the entire Tennessee General Assembly. As a mother of three, I knew I had to be the voice for women and working mothers in our state who are begging for solutions to our childcare crisis and care economy. I have been vocal about the challenges of serving in public office - whether it's rushing to drop off my kids at three different schools before morning Senate floor sessions, finding childcare to run for office, or affording the high costs of daycare and summer camps.”¹⁸

- Sen. Charlane Oliver (D-TN)

state overview:

generation

eldercare and the sandwich generation

We identified eight legislators who are caring for an adult dependent and speak openly about their experiences. Four are Baby Boomers, three are Gen X, and one is from the Silent Generation. These numbers, while small, mirror national trends. Many Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are faced with the difficult task of not only raising children but also being responsible for the care of their aging parents and relatives. Pew Research has found that 54% of American adults in their 40s are part of the Sandwich Generation - meaning they are caring for young children and an aging parent at the same time.¹⁸

<3%
of all state legislators are millennial moms of minors, despite nearly half of US millennials giving birth as of 2018¹⁶

37.2%
of all moms of minor children in our dataset are millennials

9%
of all women state legislators in our dataset are millennial moms of minors

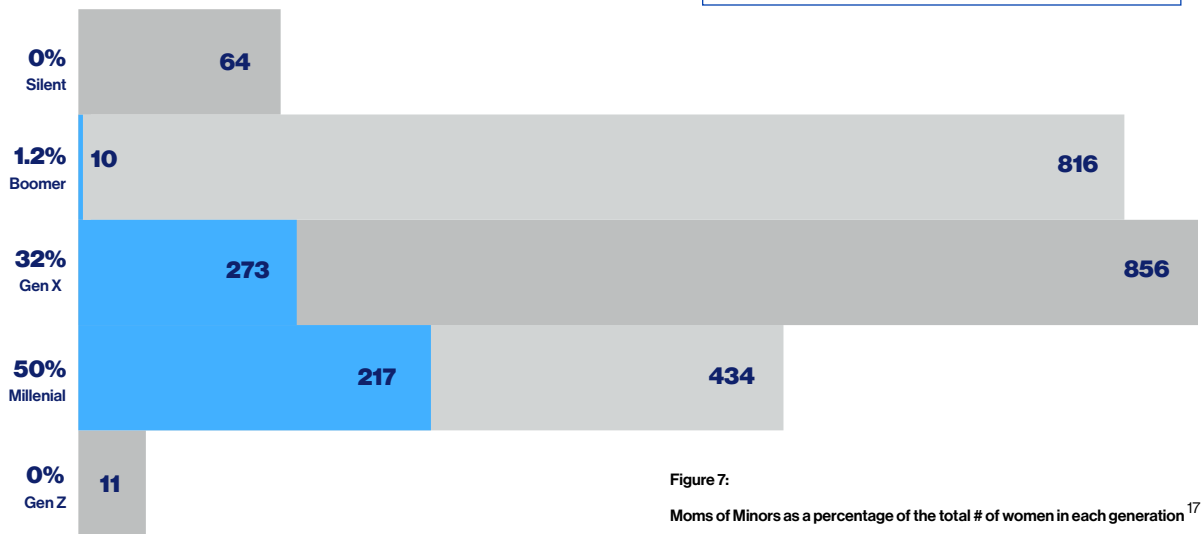


Figure 7: Moms of Minors as a percentage of the total # of women in each generation¹⁷

state overview: generation

As millennials continue to enter their 40s, the Sandwich Generation will likely see an increase in size. We are also cognizant that caregiving is not a static role and can be a role assumed at any time. During the research process for this report, Vote Mama Foundation found several anecdotes from current and former lawmakers about past caregiving responsibilities and the worries of affording future care for elderly loved ones. This area of research is nascent but important to continue in hopes of understanding caregiving for young children, elderly family members, and other adult dependents.

“We talk a lot up here about how representation matters, and I believe that to be true, I hope as I stand here today, and every day, as the youngest female member of this body, that it shows any young girl in this state who may find herself pregnant that her life does not end when a new one begins”

- Representative Daniel (R - GA),
who became a mom at 17.

photo: State Representative Lauren Daniel (GA - 81) with her son



“Balancing the care for my mother, my little citizens, and my community has been exhausting because I am giving my all to my family and the people of Virginia. It has also deepened my empathy for the silent struggles of those I represent. My life circumstances allow me to serve authentically, be more informed, and cut through the nonsense. I don't have time for shenanigans. Because I live this, I approach policy priorities and my legislative focus with urgency.”¹⁸

- Del. Jackie Glass (D - VA)

“When you take someone who ... still lives paycheck to paycheck, they are bringing that personal experience to fight for a bill that will impact working families.”

- Rep. Kaela Berg (D - MN), *single mother of 2 and one of 116 working-class state legislators in the US*

state overview:

political landscape

party breakdown

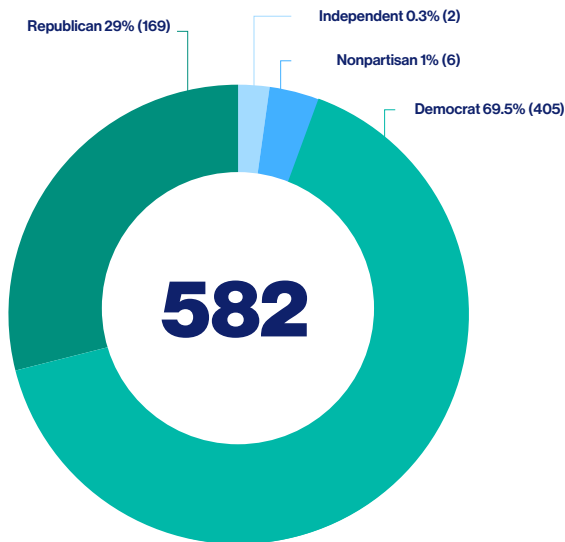


Figure 9:
Partisanship as a percentage of the total # of Moms of Minors
 Partisanship of our 582 moms of minors - the majority are democrats

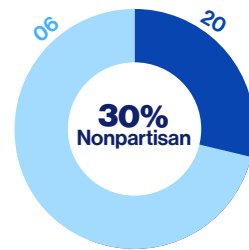
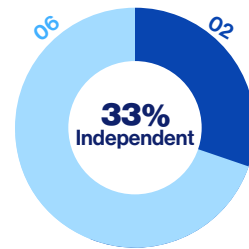
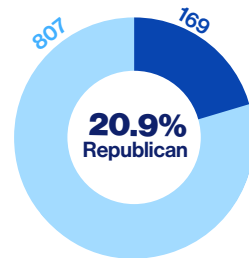
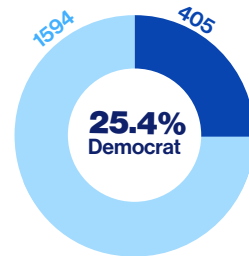


Figure 8:
Moms of Minors as a percentage of the total # of Women in each Party
 Intra-party breakdown:
 Moms Status (moms as % of women in each party; identify which party has the most moms of minors)

state overview:

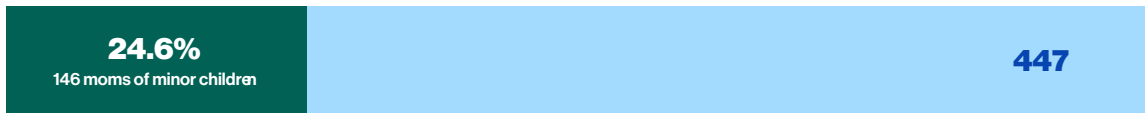
political landscape

chamber

State Senate:

593 women in state senate chambers

146/593 or 24.6% of women in state senates are moms of minor children



State House of Representatives:

1834 women in state senate chambers

436/1834 or 23.7% of women in state houses are moms of minor children

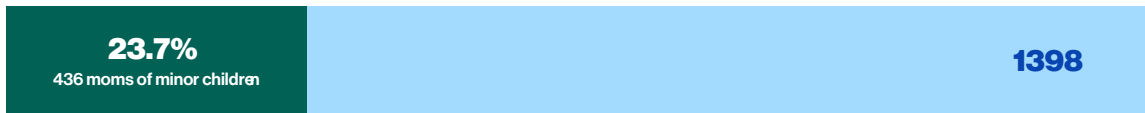


Figure 10:
number of moms of minor children in each chamber

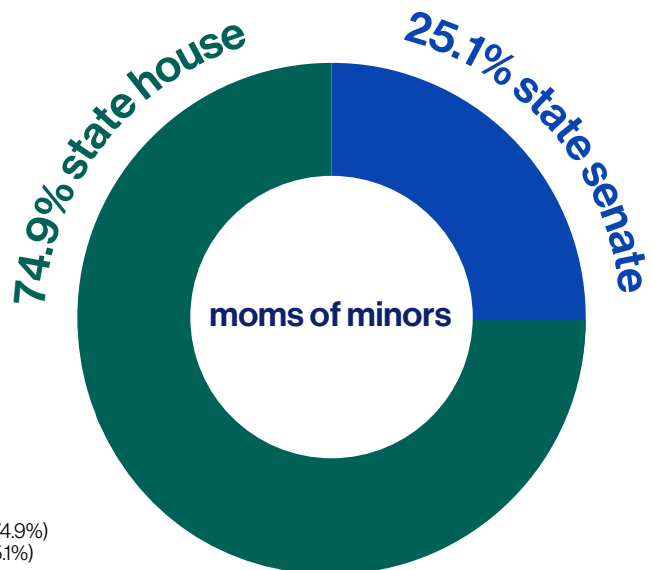
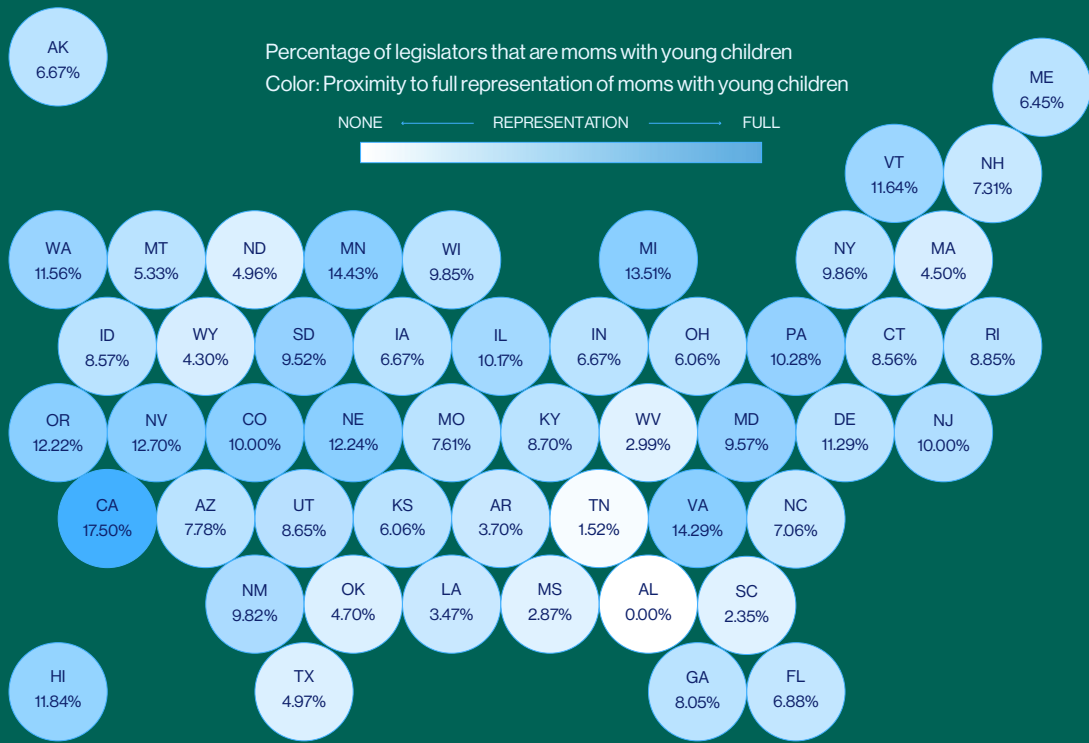


Figure 11:
chamber breakdown of all moms of minor children

436 of the 582 moms or minors are serving in state houses (74.9%)
146 of the 582 moms of minors are serving in state senate (25.1%)

Part 2

state by state overview



overview:

state rankings

Roughly 18% of women in the United States are mothers with minor children.²³ As of 2024, no state legislature in the United States has enough moms to achieve proportional representation. In order to achieve proportional representation, 763 more moms of minor children need to be elected to office.

Since 2022, many states experienced exponential growth in the number of moms of minors serving. **Among those, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Nebraska doubled in representation of moms of minors**, jumping several places in our ranking list. California is the only state legislature in the U.S. that comes close to achieving proportional representation of moms with young kids, who comprise 17.5% of its legislature. Additionally, Oregon, the only state with proportional representation in 2022, is 1 of 5 states that has had a decrease in representation; its ranking fell from 1st in 2022 to 7th in 2024.

The states with the highest representation of moms of minors are **California, Minnesota, Virginia, Michigan, Nevada.**

The states with the lowest representation of moms of minors are **West Virginia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama.**

Alaska, Alabama, South Carolina, and Tennessee have had no change in the percentage of representation since 2022.

Alabama, which ranked 50th in our last report, remains the only state in the U.S. with no moms of minor children serving in either chamber. This means that there were zero moms of minors involved in conversations about issues impacting Alabamian families, such as childcare and reproductive healthcare.

overview:**state rankings**

Only 5 states saw a decrease in the number of moms of minors in office. All 5 states are classified as hybrid legislatures, meaning they have a medium-sized staff and an average pay of \$41,110. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, legislators in hybrid legislatures spend more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of a full-time job serving as legislators, and though the pay in these states is higher than part-time legislatures, “it’s usually not enough to allow them to make a living without having another source of income.”²⁴ We theorize that the demands of longer hours, little pay, and the need for a second job contribute to the lower levels of representation among electeds with minor children.

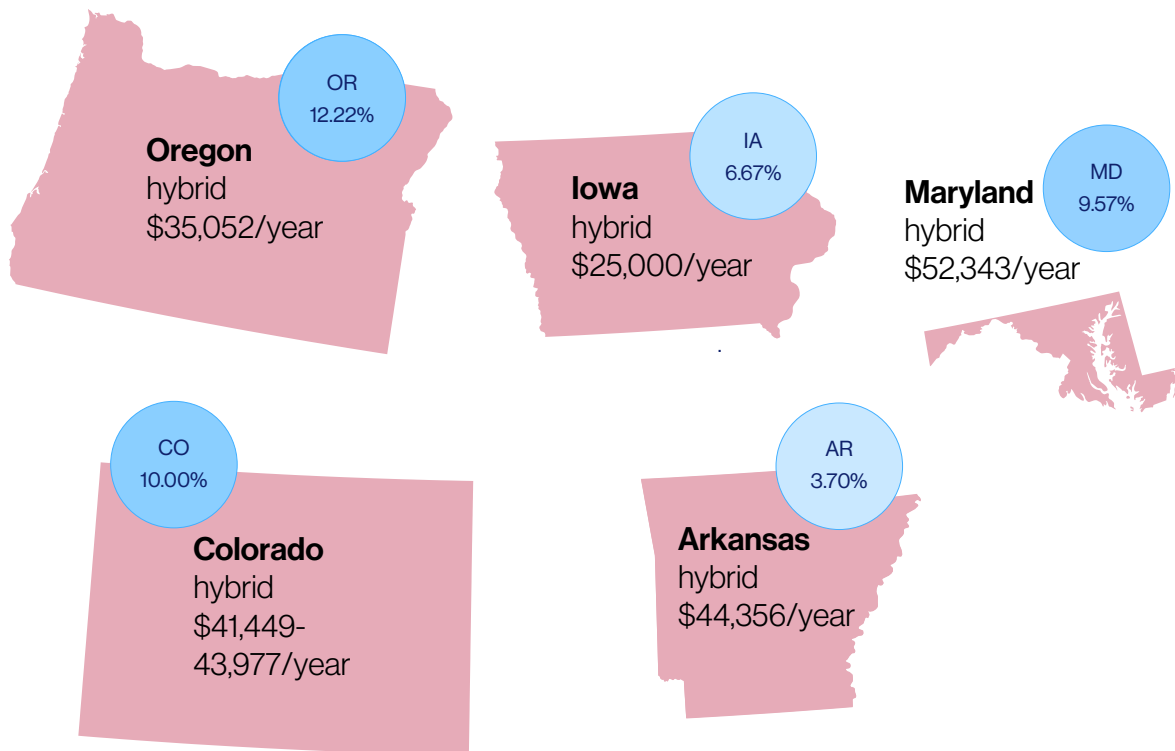



Figure 12:
graphic of MD, IA, AR, OR, CO state outlines with:
 - legislature type
 - yearly pay
 - and percentage of moms of minors in each state

Table 1:
State Rankings of Moms in State Legislature

state	2024 state ranking	2022 state ranking	change in state ranking	2024 total moms of minors	2024 total legislators	2024 % of moms of minors	moms needed to reach proportionate representation	2022 % of moms of minors	change from last report
CA	01	04	03	21	120	17.50%	01	10.83%	61.59%
MN	02	12	10	29	201	14.43%	08	6.97%	107.00%
VA	03	21	18	20	140	14.29%	06	6.43%	122.17%
MI	04	23	19	20	148	13.51%	07	6.08%	122.26%
NV	05	02	-3	08	63	12.70%	04	11.11%	14.30%
NE	06	22	16	06	49	12.24%	03	6.12%	100.08%
OR	07	01	-6	11	90	12.22%	06	17.78%	-31.26%
HI	08	18	10	09	76	11.84%	05	6.58%	79.97%
VT	09	07	-2	21	180	11.67%	12	10.00%	16.67%
WA	10	05	-5	17	147	11.56%	10	10.20%	13.38%
DE	11	20	09	07	62	11.29%	05	6.45%	75.04%
PA	12	38	26	26	253	10.28%	20	3.16%	225.21%
IL	13	09	-4	18	177	10.17%	15	8.47%	20.06%
NJ	14	11	-3	12	120	10.00%	10	7.50%	33.33%
CO	15	03	-11	10	100	10.00%	09	11.00%	-9.09%
NY	16	19	03	21	213	9.86%	18	6.57%	50.06%
WI	17	34	17	13	132	9.85%	11	3.79%	159.85%
NM	18	10	-8	11	112	9.82%	10	8.04%	22.16%
MD	19	06	-13	18	188	9.57%	17	10.11%	-5.30%
SD	20	14	-6	10	105	9.52%	10	6.67%	42.79%
RI	21	29	08	10	113	8.85%	11	4.42%	100.22%
KY	22	43	21	12	138	8.70%	14	2.17%	300.72%
UT	23	13	-10	09	104	8.65%	10	6.73%	28.59%
ID	24	14	-10	09	105	8.57%	11	6.67%	28.51%
CT	25	26	01	16	187	8.56%	18	5.35%	59.93%
GA	26	33	07	19	236	8.05%	24	3.81%	111.31%
AZ	27	14	-13	07	90	7.78%	10	6.67%	16.61%
MO	28	30	02	15	197	7.61%	21	4.06%	87.54%
NH	29	25	-4	31	424	7.31%	47	5.42%	34.90%
NC	30	36	06	12	170	7.06%	19	3.53%	99.97%
FL	31	24	-7	11	160	6.88%	19	5.63%	22.11%
AK	32	14	-18	04	60	6.67%	07	6.67%	0%
IN	33	49	17	10	150	6.67%	18	0.67%	895.02%
IA	34	07	-25	10	150	6.67%	18	10.00%	-33.33%
ME	35	28	-7	12	186	6.45%	22	4.84%	33.30%
KS	36	41	05	10	165	6.06%	20	2.42%	150.44%
OH	37	34	-2	08	132	6.06%	16	3.79%	59.91%
MT	38	44	06	08	150	5.33%	20	2.00%	166.67%
TX	39	37	-2	09	181	4.97%	24	3.31%	50.22%
ND	40	40	0	07	141	4.96%	19	2.84%	74.81%
OK	41	31	-10	07	149	4.70%	21	10.20%	16.58%
MA	42	32	-10	09	200	4.50%	28	10.83%	12.50%
WY	43	47	04	04	93	4.30%	13	6.97%	287.48%
AR	44	27	-17	05	135	3.70%	20	6.43%	-28.64%
LA	45	46	01	05	144	3.47%	22	6.08%	149.80%
WV	46	45	-1	04	134	2.99%	21	11.11%	100.34%
MS	47	39	-8	05	174	2.87%	27	6.12%	0%
SC	48	42	-6	04	170	2.35%	27	17.78%	0%
TN	49	48	-1	02	132	1.52%	22	6.58%	99.36%
AL	50	50	0	0	140	0%	26	0.00%	0.00%
TOTAL				582	7386	7.9%	763	5.3%	48.7%



“As the fifth woman to give birth in office in the 405-year history of the Virginia House of Delegates, I understand the urgent need for state legislature modernization... By advocating for reforms such as remote voting options, higher pay, and childcare stipends or on-site childcare, we can empower mothers to not only enter but thrive in office, paving the way for more inclusive governance and better policies for all families”

-Del. Elizabeth Bennett-Parker (D - VA)

state overview: attrition

caregiving, work-life balance, and state politics

State legislatures need to be modernized. Many legislatures are still operating with the same systems enacted in the Colonial Era of the United States, which were designed for white, wealthy, male landowners. Originally, legislatures were designed to be “citizen legislatures” where sessions were not intended to be time intensive. By 1900, no state legislature provided staff for individual lawmakers, and few provided staff support for committees. Salaries were also, on average, less than \$240 per session;²⁵ adjusted for inflation, this amounts to just under \$8,000 today.²⁶ **Sadly, 124 years later, not much has changed. Only about half of state legislatures provide year-round personal staff, and only four states pay legislators a livable salary.**²⁷

This has important consequences for women, particularly those who are mothers. Women legislators are less likely to be married, have fewer years of state legislative service, and are five years older than men are when first elected to the state legislature.²⁸ Women who have or want children are less likely than their male counterparts to consider running for office if they have a further commute to their state capitol.²⁹ Similarly, women who are the primary breadwinners in their households are less likely to run³⁰ for office than their female counterparts, even after expressing the desire to run. These differences point to deeper, structural factors that prevent otherwise ambitious women from seeking and staying in elected office.



“The Montana Legislature was designed for people — often men — who have flexible schedules with steady and significant incomes. Our state is so much more than one type of person. Legislative systems need to adapt so that more young people, students, single parents, and those living on low incomes can serve.”

-Frmr Rep. Mallerie Stromswold,
(R-MT), *from her resignation letter that cites work environment and work-life balance as reasons for leaving.*

state overview: attrition



the cost of staying in office

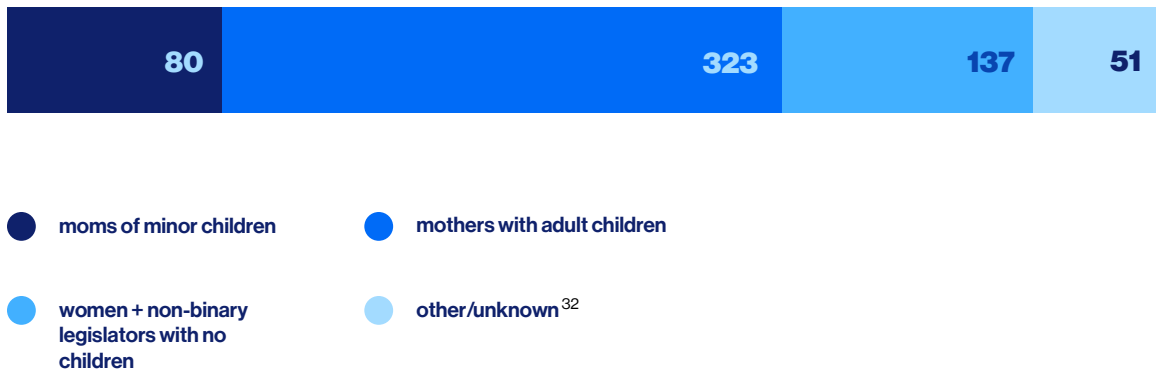
Vote Mama Foundation believes in making legislatures family-friendly work environments so all types of caregivers can serve. Unfortunately, many legislators have expressed concern about serving, often citing low pay and long hours. In 2022, three Oregon legislators jointly resigned citing the high costs of staying in office. The resignation letter cited low pay, difficulty balancing multiple jobs, and additional expenses for travel to the state capitol.³¹ Because legislative spaces were designed without women and parents in mind, we need to identify and break down the

barriers that have historically kept underrepresented people out of decision-making bodies.

This is the first time Vote Mama Foundation has collected data on attrition. Our first step is to identify who leaves office and why. Of the 2,285 women state legislators included in our 2022 Politics of Parenthood report, we identified 591 who have since left office. Of the 591, 80 were mothers of minor children. This amounts to 20% of all moms of minors who served in 2022. While this number may seem small, it is consequential considering that moms of minors only made up 5% of state legislators at the time.

photo: State Senator Rochelle Nguyen (NV-3) with her daughter

Figure 13
graphs of women who have left office since 2022 as % of women vs. moms



state overview: attrition

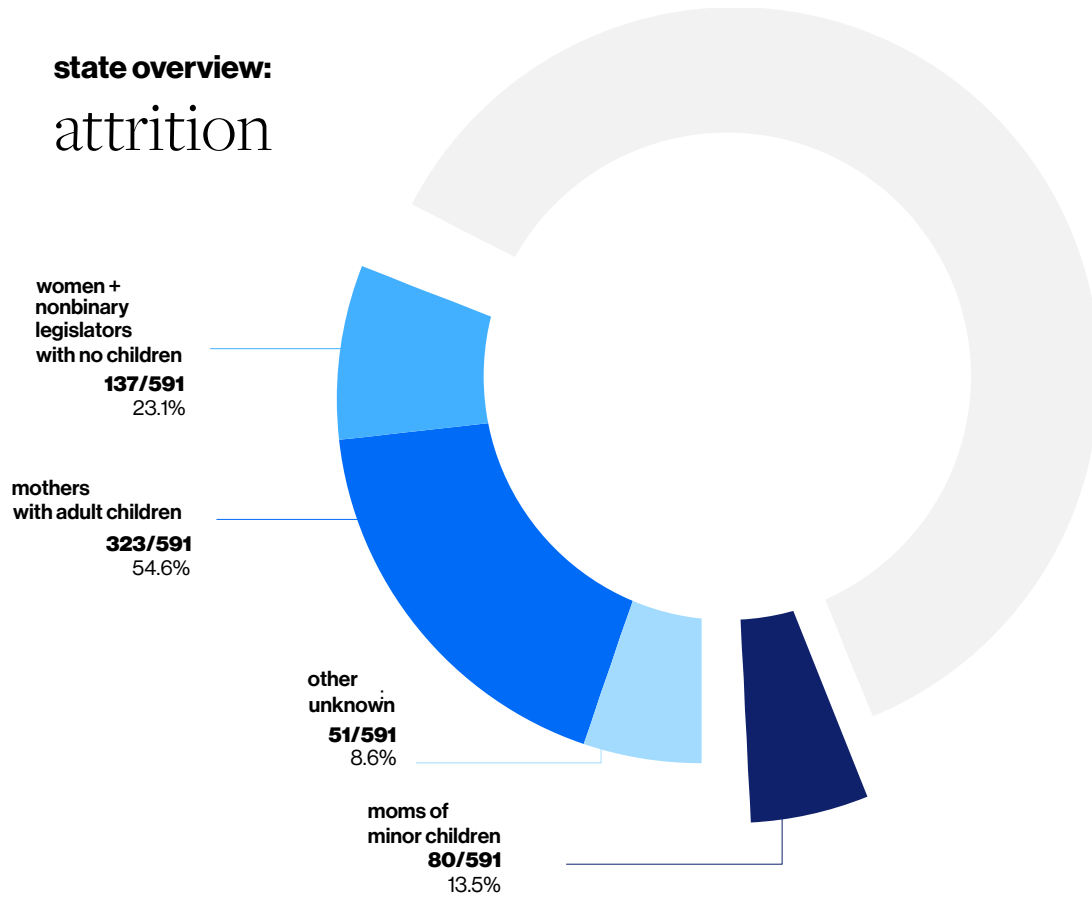
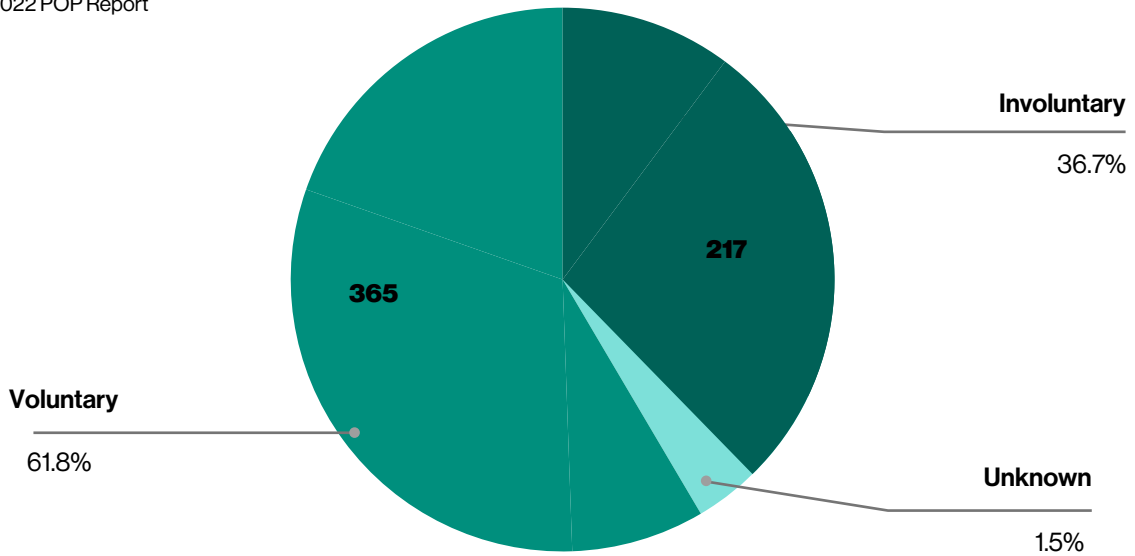


Figure 13
graphs of women who have left office since 2022 as % of women vs. moms

Figure 14
voluntary vs. involuntary attrition of all women legislators in 2022 POP Report



state overview: attrition

reasons for leaving office

Caregiving, family, and work environment were the **third** most cited reasons for leaving office, behind running for other office and retirement.

Of all legislators who left voluntarily, **22** cited caregiving or family responsibilities, and **9** cited professionalization/workplace issues. Across both categories, **9** legislators cited both issues.³³

In addition to finding the women who have left office since 2022, we have also identified the reasons given for leaving office. After reading public announcements of all legislators who left office, we categorized the reasons for leaving as either voluntary or involuntary. We define involuntary attrition as factors beyond the control of a legislator: term limits, redistricting, losing a primary or general election, or resignation due to scandal. We define voluntary attrition as a reason for leaving office that was made at the discretion of the legislator: retirement, seeking other elected office, other professional opportunities, family/caregiving responsibilities, and workplace issues.

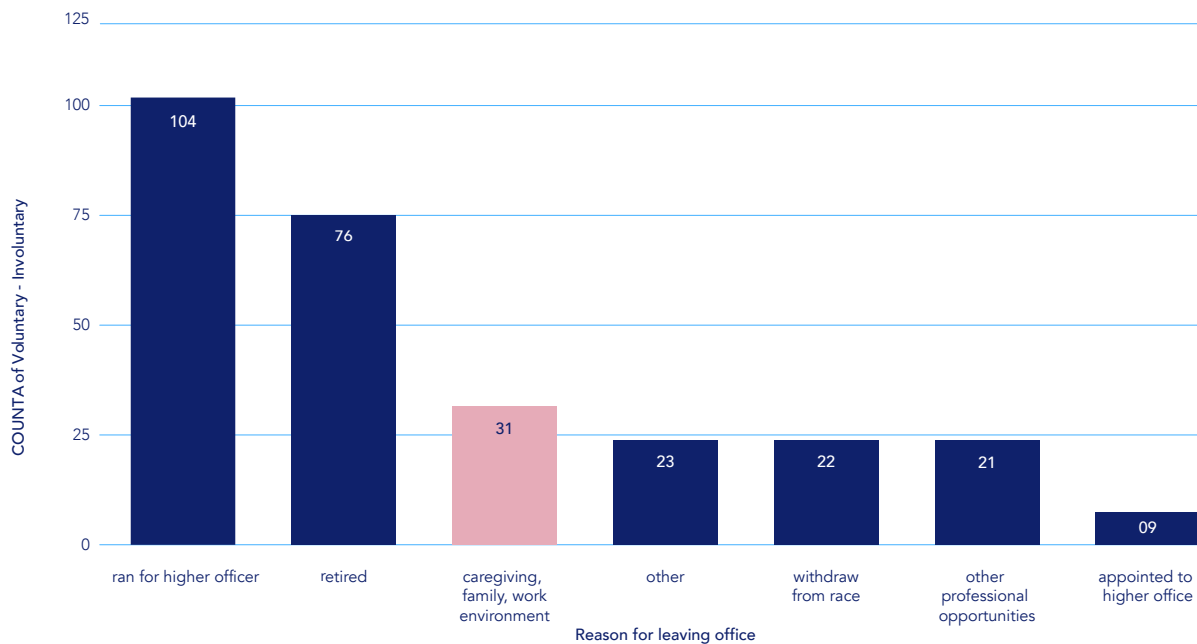


Figure 15
voluntary reasons for leaving office all women legislators

recommendations

1. Every state legislator should be paid a living wage to support themselves and their families.

Only four states pay state legislators a living wage. In six states, childcare costs more than a legislator's salary. In many other states the cost of childcare is greater than half of a legislator's salary. Everyday parents running for and serving in public office should not need to risk losing access to basic needs for themselves and their families in order to serve their communities. To have a legislature that looks like the everyday people it serves, we need to elect people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. This is only possible with paying state legislators a living wage.

2. All state legislators should have access to paid family and medical leave.

State legislators can technically take time off while in session, but if they do, they are not allowed to attend or participate in any votes or hearings. This forced all-or-nothing absence puts legislators who want to have children or have caregiving responsibilities at risk of losing their next election due to missed participation. Legislators who have given birth need time to physically recover and bond with their newborn. All parents - dads, moms, adopted parents - need time to bond with and care for their newborns. No one should have to decide between their family and running for elected office.

3. All state legislators should have the option to participate in votes and committee hearings remotely.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, state legislatures across the country adjusted to remote work just as schools and corporations did. However, most state legislatures have largely pushed back against permanent hybrid changes, forcing legislators to attend in-person committee hearings and votes. The unpredictability of voting schedules, combined with rules requiring in-person voting, impacts a legislator's ability to balance caregiving needs and their legislative duties. This has the potential to disproportionately impact mothers with minor children. Research shows that women are 15 times more likely to be responsible for caregiving. Remote options ensure equitable access and should be permanent for all state legislators.

recommendations

4. All state legislators should be eligible to receive reimbursements to cover the costs of childcare and dependent care expenses that are directly related to carrying out their official duties.

More than half of all states provide per diem compensation - a reimbursement to cover meals, lodging, and incidental costs while performing official governmental duties - as a way to offset the costs associated with serving in the legislature. Currently, no states include childcare expenses in per diem compensation for legislators. When a legislator travels to the capitol to perform their legislative duties, they should receive a reimbursement for childcare costs, in addition to hotel or meals.

5. Mamas Caucuses build the political power of moms to pass truly family-friendly policies.

Caucuses enable legislators to work together to introduce and pass legislation to achieve real solutions for the problems working families face. At the federal level, both moms and dads have formed coalitions (Moms in the House Caucus and Congressional Dads Caucus) to bond over their unique experience as both caretakers and legislators and to advocate for policies that matter to working families. States can replicate this model and build Mama Caucuses in state legislatures across the country.

6. All state legislators should have access to changing tables, pumping rooms, and on-site childcare at the capitol.

More than half the population lives in a childcare desert. When you factor in finding childcare providers in two locations for a constantly changing part-time schedule, securing childcare can be impossible. On-site childcare for state legislators should be available to better meet the needs of legislators and staff. Legislative buildings are not fully accessible for parents, especially nursing moms. At the state level, there has been no consistent movement to address this need and install changing tables and pumping rooms in all legislative buildings. Every state legislative building should provide changing tables in all members' bathrooms, regardless of gender, and ensure accessibility of pumping rooms.

conclusion

State lawmakers are legislating on more and more issues with enormous impact on the lives of their constituents. Meanwhile, just 33% of all state legislators are women. Only 7.9% are moms of minor children, and only 2.2% are moms of minor children and women of color. **Moms with minor children are represented in state legislatures at less than half the rate they appear in the population. It is no surprise that American policies are failing women and families.**

Our data suggests that the lack of representation of moms with minor children is the result of structural marginalization rather than individual circumstances or preferences. **Further, it suggests that moms of young children face barriers that are unique or intensified compared to women and mothers of adult children.** We need the lived experiences of those systematically shut out from politics and decision-making to inform, shape, and advocate for legislation that helps all communities grow and thrive.



By changing the policymakers, we can change the policies, but first, we must change the political system.

With little pay, often no benefits, little flexibility to participate remotely, long commute times, and chaotic schedules; women and young families struggle to remain in office and sustainably represent their communities.

We have to modernize our state legislatures if we want a truly representative democracy - where the policies being put forth reflect the will and needs of the people. **We envision a thriving, effective, gender-balanced, and multiracial democracy in which all 50 state legislatures are professionalized, and holding elected office becomes an accessible and sustainable path for people of all backgrounds.**

Vote Mama Foundation will continue to expand our research in identifying, analyzing, and breaking down barriers that systematically exclude mamas from accessing political positions of power. The data presented here is long overdue, but it is just the beginning of our collective understanding of the experience of being both a legislator and a caretaker.

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to confirm the career held by legislators at the current moment in time, since most legislative sessions only meet part-time. The list of occupations is not exhaustive, but to our knowledge, our Politics of Parenthood dataset is the only dataset that includes both occupation and parent-hood status. We look forward to expanding occupational data in the future.

State by state overview

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33. We believe this number to be higher, but not all legislators announce the reason for their resignation. Data collection for this section relied on public resignation announcements. We omitted the resignation announcements in which a legislator did not give details about the nature of their resignation.

Photos

34. State Senator Jennifer Denise Carroll Foy and child
35. Huldah Hiltzley, candidate for Minnesota House District 38A, with son
36. Vote Mama Staff with candidates and supporters; child wearing Vote Mama merchandise photographed by Ashley Comans; Vote Mama Foundation's Chief Program Officer speaking
37. State Delegate Kathy Tran (VA - 18) being sworn into office while holding her child Photographed by Timothy C. Wright for the Washington Post.
38. State Senator Kesha Ram Hinsdale (VT - Chittenden Southeast District)
39. State Representative Samantha Sencer-Mura (MN - 63A) with her child
40. State Senator Charlane Oliver (TN - 19) with her daughter
41. State Representative Lauren Daniel (GA - 81) with her son
42. State Delegate Jackie Glass (VA - 93) Photo by <https://www.styleweekly.com/photo-essay-creatives-for-virginia-rally/>
43. State Representative Kaela Berg (MN - 55B) with the child of a constituent
44. State Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker (VA - 45) with her husband and infant daughter
45. State Representative Sarah Liiguori (AZ - 28) with her son
46. Former State Representative Mallerie Stromswold (MT - 50), a former state representative who was elected at age 19 and served while attending college full time.
47. State Senator Rochelle Nguyen (NV - 3) with her daughter
48. Vote Mama Foundation Founder and CEO Liuba Grechen Shirley with her three children. Photographed for Argent
49. State Representative Sarah Liiguori (AZ - 28) with her son

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photo: State Representative Sarah Liguori (AZ - 28) with her son