

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Politics is often referred to as the last “glass ceiling.” The 2016 presidential election confirmed that statement as Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, who most experts thought was the prohibitive favorite after the conventions. This year – 2018 – has been called the “Year of the Woman” in politics because of the increase in women candidates across the country and the power exerted by women voters in 2017 elections in New Jersey and Virginia, as well as their turnout in primaries in 2018.

Women make up 51.4 percent of the population in the state and almost 54 percent of the voters in North Carolina. These demographic data points, as well as female challengers running well against Republican incumbents in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> congressional districts might make many citizens think women are going to start making headway on the gender disparity that has existed between men and women officeholders.

Although women candidates such as Linda Coleman and Kathy Manning may indeed win their general election matchups against George Holding and Ted Budd, respectively, on November 6, even those victories are not going to change the gender gap of North Carolina politics. Put simply, even though it has been 26 years since 1992, the last “Year of the Woman” in politics, North Carolina remains a male-dominated state in terms of officeholders and candidates, especially in rural parts of the state.

Since the last *Status of Women in North Carolina Politics* report in 2015, women have gained and lost ground in terms of elected and appointed positions. North Carolina has approximately 5,000 elected positions and almost an equal number of appointed positions at the state and local level. Women hold less than a quarter of all elected positions and around a third of all appointed positions. At the elected level, this is a slight decline over 2015.

There are bright spots for women in North Carolina politics:

- Women are serving as mayors of its three largest cities.
- Republican women in the North Carolina legislature are at record levels.
- The percentage of women serving in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches is higher than the national average for women serving in those positions.

Despite these positives, there are many aspects to women in North Carolina politics that are negative:

- The percentage of women candidates running in 2018, as compared to 2014, is lower.
- The number of counties in which the board of county commissioners has no women serving has increased from 44 to 46 counties.
- The rural parts of the state, which have been particularly less represented by women in elected office, has lost ground.

This report is meant to be a wakeup call for North Carolina politics. As we strive to be a truly representative democracy, women, who are a majority of the state’s citizens, need a bigger place at the political table.