

# THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN WASHINGTON: HIGHLIGHTS

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) has prepared a report on the *Status of Women in Washington* to inform Washington residents about the progress of women in Washington relative to women in other states, to men, and to national trends. In addition to this report, IWPR staff have produced reports on 12 other states and the District of Columbia as well as a national report that summarizes key findings for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In each report, various indicators describe the status of women in four important areas: political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and reproductive rights. Basic health and demographic data are also provided. On three of the four aspects of women's well-being for which IWPR calculated composite indicators, Washington ranks in the top ten of the nation. Despite its relatively high rank nationwide, Washington ranks first in the Pacific West region (consisting of Alaska, California, Hawaii, and Oregon in addition to Washington) on only the political participation composite indicator. Washington ranks 33rd in the nation on the ratio of women's to men's earnings. Thus Washington still has room for improvement in the status of its women.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### *Ranks*

The composite political participation rank is based on women's voter registration and turnout, women elected officials at the state and federal levels, and women's institutional resources in the state (such as a state commission for women). The national rank is of a possible 50, because the District of Columbia is not included in this ranking. The regional rank is of a maximum of five and refers to the states in the Pacific West region.

- Washington ranks second in the nation and first in the Pacific West region on the political participation composite indicator.
- Washington ranks 21st in the nation on women's voter registration. There are over 427,000 unregistered women who are eligible to vote in the state of Washington.
- Despite a relatively high rank on the political participation composite indicator, Washington ranks 37th in the nation on women's institutional resources. The state has neither a Commission on the Status of Women nor a legislative caucus for women in the state Senate, although there is a legislative caucus in the state House of Representatives.

### *Facts and Figures*

- Fifty-eight of the 147 seats in Washington's state legislature were filled by women in 1996, placing Washington first among all states in terms of the highest percentage of women in the state legislature.

## Chart I. How Washington Ranks on Key Indicators

	National Rank*	Regional Rank*
<b>COMPOSITE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION INDEX</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Women's Voter Registration, 1992-1994	21	3
Women's Voter Turnout, 1992-1994	21	3
Women in Elected Office Composite, 1996	2	1
Women's Institutional Resources, 1996	37	3
<b>COMPOSITE EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS INDEX</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1990	11	3
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1990	33	5
Women's Labor Force Participation, 1994	31	4
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1994	11	3
<b>COMPOSITE ECONOMIC AUTONOMY INDEX</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 1991-1992	11	2
Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990	14	4
Women's Business Ownership, 1992	9	3
Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1990	13	3
<b>COMPOSITE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS INDEX</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>
<p><i>See Appendix I of The Status of Women in the States, available from IWPR, for a detailed description of the methodology and sources used for the indices presented here.</i></p> <p><i>* The national rankings are of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, except for the political participation indicators, which do not include the District of Columbia. The regional rankings are of a maximum of five and refer to the states in the Pacific West region (Washington, California, Oregon, Alaska, and Hawaii).</i></p>		

*Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.*

- Since 1964, female voters in the United States have outnumbered male voters, but voter turnout is relatively low for both sexes by international standards. Sixty-nine percent of eligible women and 64 percent of eligible men in Washington reported that they voted in the November 1992 election.

## EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

### *Ranks*

The composite employment and earnings rank is based on women's median annual earnings, the female/male earnings ratio, women's labor force participation, and the proportion of working women in professional and managerial positions. The national rank is of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

- Washington ranks 15th in the nation and fourth in its region on the employment and earnings composite indicator.
- The area of employment and earnings in which Washington performs the worst is the ratio of women's to men's earnings: Washington ranks 33rd in the nation on the earnings ratio and last in its region.

### *Facts and Figures*

- Compared with the nation as a whole, Washington women have slightly lower earnings equality with men. In 1990, the ratio of the median annual earnings of women to those of men for full-time, year-round workers aged 18 to 65 was 68.5 percent in the United States and 66.5 percent in Washington.
- In 1994, the unemployment rate for women in Washington was 6.3 percent compared with the nation's 6.0 percent female unemployment rate. Washington has the second highest unemployment rate for women in the Pacific West region.

## **ECONOMIC AUTONOMY**

### *Ranks*

The composite economic autonomy rank is based on women's access to health insurance, women's educational attainment, women's business ownership, and the proportion of women living above poverty.

- Washington ranks eighth in the nation and second in its region on the economic autonomy composite indicator.
- Washington ranks 13th in the nation and third in its region in terms of the percent of women above poverty.

### *Facts and Figures*

- In general, women in Washington tend to be more highly educated than the national average. Over 53 percent of women in Washington have more than a high school education compared with 42.6 percent of women in the United States.
- The business receipts of women-owned businesses in Washington rose by 177.3 percent in constant dollars between 1987 and 1992. This compares favorably with an increase of 87 percent in business receipts for women-owned firms nationally and 35 percent for all firms in the United States during this time period, also adjusted for inflation.

## **REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

### *Ranks*

The composite reproductive rights rank is based on information on legislation relating to access to legal abortions, the availability of public funding for abortions and infertility treatments, the position of the governor and state legislature on reproductive choice, maternity stay laws, and legislation regarding adoption by gay/lesbian couples.

- Washington ranks tenth in the nation and third in its region on the reproductive rights composite indicator.

### *Facts and Figures*

- Twenty-eight percent of counties in Washington have abortion providers, 12 percentage points above the national average.
- Washington has no legislation regarding the issue of adoption by gay and lesbian couples.

## **HEALTH AND VITAL STATISTICS**

- Washington has lower infant mortality rates (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births), lower fertility rates (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44), and a lower percent of low birth weight babies than the nation as a whole. This may indicate that women in Washington have better access to pre- and postnatal care than women nationally.
- The percentage of the population enrolled in HMOs in Washington is lower than in the United States as a whole (16.4 percent compared with 19.5 percent). Still, Medicare recipients in Washington are somewhat more likely than those nationwide to be enrolled in an HMO (13.5 percent versus 9.2 percent), and the majority of Medicaid recipients in Washington are enrolled in an HMO (70.6 percent in Washington versus 21.4 percent in the nation).

## **BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS**

- Washington has a slightly smaller elderly population than the nation as a whole (13.5 percent compared with 14.7 percent in the United States).
- The female population in Washington is less ethnically diverse than in the nation as a whole, with minority women making up about 13 percent of women in Washington compared with 24 percent of women in the United States as a whole. Washington has a relatively large Asian-American population compared with the nation as a whole (4.6 percent versus 2.9 percent).

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*The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, non-profit, scientific research organization founded in 1987 to meet the need for women-centered, policy-oriented research. This Research-in-Brief is based on the report The Status of Women in Washington, part of a larger research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The data used in the report come from a variety of sources, primarily government agencies, and individuals and organizations in Washington assisted in reviewing the report. The Advisory Committee for the report in Washington was headed by Jane Field.*

*This Research-in-Brief was written by Stacey Friedman and prepared by Megan DeBell in March 1997. The full report, The Status of Women in Washington, is available for \$10.00 from the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Members and affiliates of the Institute's Information Network receive regular reports and information. For a copy of the full report or more information on membership, please contact IWPR at 1400 20th Street N.W., Suite 104, Washington, D.C. 20036, phone 202/785-5100, fax 202/833-4362, or visit our web site at <http://www.iwpr.org>.*

*In Washington, for copies of this report, contact: Jane Field, 2000 Ward Lake Lane, SE, Olympia, WA 98501, phone 360/352-0167, or by e-mail at [wojafi@aol.com](mailto:wojafi@aol.com).*