

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

NEW HAMPSHIRE



From [Abigail Adams](#) to [suffragists](#), to the election of [Kamala Harris](#) as vice president of the United States, the nation has worked steadily towards gender equality. While the nation forges this path together, each state that makes up the union has undergone its own journey. One state, notable for reaching milestones in women's history before others, is [New Hampshire](#). The first milestone for New Hampshire was in 1999. In that year, New Hampshire became the first state with a female governor, state Senate president and state House speaker serving at the same time. Their next milestone occurred ten years later when New Hampshire became the first state with a legislative body that reached or surpassed gender [parity](#). The legislative branch in New Hampshire, known as the [General Court of New Hampshire](#), consists of two chambers, a House of Representatives and a Senate. There are 400 representatives and 24 senators, making it the largest state legislature in the nation. In the [2008 election](#), voters elected 13 women to the 24 state Senate seats, therefore creating the first state legislative body in the country's history with more women than men (54%). More recently, [in 2012](#), New Hampshire became the first state in U.S. history to send an all-female delegation to Washington, D.C. The state was represented in the U.S. Senate by Jeanne Shaheen and Kelly Ayotte and in the U.S. House by Carol Shea-Porter and Annie Kuster. Members of this delegation were no strangers to breaking barriers as [Jeanne Shaheen](#) was the state's first elected female governor and the first woman in the country to be elected both governor and U.S. senator. The second woman in history to do this, would be [Margaret Hassan](#), also from New Hampshire, who unseated Senator Ayotte in 2016. So, why New Hampshire? Women in New Hampshire broke ceilings early on and have held elective office since 1921, just a year after getting the right to vote, establishing a cultural norm for women holding political office earlier than some states. Much of New Hampshire's success in achieving these historical firsts can also be attributed to the unique structure of their state legislature. Often referred to as a "Citizen Legislature," there are more opportunities for women to be elected with the [large number of legislators](#) in the New Hampshire House of Representatives relative to its smaller population size. In addition, serving in the state legislature is more of a volunteer position. Those elected only receive \$200 per term and mileage costs. This allows the state legislature to attract candidates who may not be interested in a lifetime political career to still be elected and play a civic role. Many of those elected can maintain other prominent careers and find it easier to balance additional life responsibilities such as parenting or being a student. While the state of New Hampshire holds an impressive record of "female firsts," true equality, as [stated](#) by former state Senate President Sylvia Larsen, "...will come when electing women or people of color is no longer a news story."

Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

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| Current Gender Make-up of Your State Legislature: | |
| Number of Women From Your State Currently Serving in the U.S. Senate: | |
| Number of Women From Your State Currently Serving in the U.S. House: | |



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