

The status of women

Where a woman lives makes a big difference in her life socially, economically and medically. But regardless of which state she calls home, she still isn't faring as well as her male neighbors. A new survey, *The 2002 Status of Women in the States*, published by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), details how much women's rights and status vary among the states – and even within states – based on race and earnings. Based on the IWPR's findings, not only have women still not achieved equality with men, the disparities in women's status among the states have not improved either.

In the state rankings, Massachusetts earned the top spot, tying with Minnesota and Vermont. Hawaii has the best reproductive freedoms for women, Washington has the most women in key government offices and the District of Columbia is the best place in the country for a woman to earn a living. Mississippi ranks as the worst state for women, with other states in the south trailing along the bottom of the list. Florida and Pennsylvania also rank as some of the worst states for women.

Moreover, the report shows that just as we celebrated the 30th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, we continue to face more pressures on a woman's right to make her own childbearing decisions. Most states show a mixed commitment to reproductive freedom, but women's reproductive rights are continually challenged in every state. Women who live in Mississippi, North and South Dakota have extreme challenges in this area, whereas women living in Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland and Vermont have greater repro-

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quORTerly briefing:
issues and trends

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- Lucille Brotman, Writer/Editor



ductive freedom. In spite of these continuing pressures, polls taken in January show public support for abortion when a women's health or life is in danger or there is evidence of impairment to the baby. More than six of 10 surveyed said they would oppose the Supreme Court overturning its 1973 decision allowing abortion.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Look up** *The 2002 Status of Women in the States* at www.iwpr.org/states2002/index.htm and write a bulletin article outlining those items that mention your state. Ask members to discuss what factors affect them. You can also take a look at www.wilpf.org/washington/statusofwomen2002.html (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom).

■ **Invite** speakers on women's issues as a chapter program. Speakers are available from groups such as NOW, ACLU, Planned Parenthood, as well as universities and colleges. You could have postcards prepared on a specific issue for your members to sign and send to elected officials.

■ **Discuss** what stand your elected officials take on women's rights and the right to choice. Ask several members each month to keep in touch with those officials. Remind your members that they are communicating as individuals. Local telephone books list

elected officials' offices in the front of the book.

■ **Keep** track of legislation in the House and Senate and your state legislative body. Share information with your members, asking them to voice their opinions. You can look up your legislators by zip code at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

Protect Title IX

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational programs or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

-From the preamble to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

Today, more women have the opportunity to participate in high school and college sports than ever before, evidence that Title IX is working as intended. The

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The National Office has
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Department of Education's own web site includes an encouraging list of progress indicators toward equal opportunity. The list includes figures for women enrolling and completing college, obtaining graduate and professional degrees, and participating in intercollegiate athletics. The figures represent a very impressive list of accomplishments, if not exactly everything on our wish list. That has not stopped an attack launched by opponents of Title IX. For months, a federal commission met to examine the legislation, reviewing controversial proposals that would have called for more lenient numerical standards in judging whether schools were in compliance with the law.

On Jan. 31, 2003, the commission, according to *Newsday*, "Closed the front door on what some critics said was an attempt to weaken Title IX, while it quietly opened a back door by approving several proposals that might have just as adverse effects on female athletes."

The final recommendation passed by the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics was a suggestion that the Department of Education explore additional methods of allowing schools to comply with Title IX. Education Secretary Rod Paige now has a free hand to come up with his own solutions. The commission also recognized the merits of "substantial proportionality."

Advocates of Title IX are angry. The Director of the Women's Sports Foundation said the commission had advanced "discriminatory proposals of a different color." The senior woman administrator at the NCAA said "...there are proposals that could result in us moving dramatically away from the original intent of Title IX."

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Use** the figures from the Department of Education, available at www.ed.gov/pubs/TitleIX, in a bulletin article.

■ **Suggest** your members keep a close watch on news reports about women's sports and Title IX. Urge them to write and e-mail the Department of Education and Secretary Paige. The League of Women Voters has published a strong statement at www.lwv.org.

■ **Find** more information and opinions by using a search engine such as www.google.com. You can simply type in "Title IX" to find links to newspapers and online articles.

Shrinking budgets and education

Every state and city is facing budgetary problems as our country enters the new budget year with less and less income. Many lawmakers and education officials are complaining that the federal government is calling for schools to comply with dozens of new requirements without providing enough money to do the job. Individual school districts are trying to deal with shrinking budgets while attempting to preserve teachers' jobs and smaller classes.

Even before budget cuts, most states were struggling to implement the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, President Bush's education reform plan. Only 12 states are on track to comply with even half of the major federal requirements, while Congress has been instructed to freeze overall federal education spending at last year's levels. Forty education programs – including dropout prevention, school counselors and rural education – would be eliminated.

Also in danger is the quality of special education services for 5.6 million children as Congress begins to review federal funding to states and local schools for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Congress has a 26-year history of insufficient support for education of students with disabilities.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Encourage** your members to keep up with education news in their local papers. Those with school-age children can stay in touch with teachers and administrators. Parental support is essential for the success of public education. Many schools are now engaged in extensive fund raising, with students selling a variety of products in their own neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the poorest schools have the least capability to raise funds. Check out the National Education Association's site at www.nea.org.

■ **Keep** in touch with your legislators. Local, state and federal representatives need to hear from women who care about education.

■ **Visit** the web site of the National Center for Learning Disabilities at www.ncld.org for articles on legislation and what citizens can do to improve educational programs for people with learning disabilities. Also see www.schwablearning.org (A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids With Learning Differences).

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