



Illinois Council on Women and Girls' Annual Report
2020

Pursuant to 20 ILCS 5130/30

Letter from the Chair – Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

What we see, feel, learn, and how we are treated as girls will profoundly shape the women we become. I am a Black woman, and the mother of four daughters, who is consciously aware of the strength, compassion, love, duty, and activism within me.

How did I become self-aware when I live in a world that does not always see and value women and girls?

My mother, Velma, a teacher, had a quiet grace and an enormous heart. As a girl, I felt her love and saw how she showed others love, too. Because of her legacy, I see the humanity of others. I know how important it is to honor that humanity because everyone deserves the right to bring their authentic selves into rooms and receive equitable treatment and opportunities. Until this is achieved, we must root out gender bias, racism, and xenophobia from every system and institution in this nation.

At the center of this belief is the work of the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, which I am proud to lead. When the Illinois Council on Women and Girls first took form, I knew that leading a body focused on uplifting women and girls across the state provided a unique opportunity to turn ideas into action.

This commitment to action fueled the work of the Council in this challenging year. When confronted by the dual crises of COVID-19 and persisting racial injustice, the Council remained resilient in its efforts to address how these issues disproportionately affect women and girls.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has uniquely decreased women's economic outcomes, increased vulnerability to gender-based violence, and exacerbated the many other existing inequities we face. Across the country, Black men and women died as a result of police brutality. These tragedies shed light on the pervasive and unacceptable systemic racism that persists in this nation. The lives of Breonna Taylor, Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, Eleanor Bumpers, Alberta Spruill, and so many other lives lost, mattered.

I am so grateful to the Council's dynamic members, who each time bring their authentic power into the room to promote gender equity across Illinois. For we know that when we embrace, encourage, educate, and energize girls, that creates empowered women who make the world a better place. As we close out the second year of this Council's existence—a year unlike any other—I am proud of how we have shown up for women and girls, through our passion for change and the work we have accomplished. I am moved by the opportunities presented to us as we look forward to next year; and hope that you will join me in taking on this upstanding work.

Juliana Stratton
Illinois Lieutenant Governor – Council on Women and Girls Chair

Executive Summary

Pursuant to 20 ILCS 5130/30, this report from the Illinois Council on Women and Girls (Council) describes the creation and membership of the Council, activities the Council conducted, and the progress made on its policy and advocacy recommendations provided to the Governor and General Assembly. The Council furnishes this report and its recommendations to improve the lives of women and girls as they relate to the four issue-based committees the Council opted to create, which includes: 1.) Gender-Based Violence, 2.) Health & Healthcare, 3.) Leadership & Inclusion, and 4.) Academic & Economic Opportunity.

Council Overview and Activities

The Illinois legislature established the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act sponsored by Senator Jacqueline Collins and Representative Anna Moeller. The statute mandates that the Council “advise the Governor and General Assembly on policy issues and initiatives impacting the lives of women and girls in Illinois.”ⁱ The statute establishes a 32-member council composed of ex-officio members representing state agencies as well as individuals appointed by the Governor and the General Assembly.

Recommendations and Progress

In 2019, the Council’s Inaugural year, the committees made a total of fourteen (14) recommendations. There were four (4) related to gender-based violence, four (4) related to academic & economic opportunity, three (3) related to leadership & inclusion, and three (3) related to health & healthcare. In 2020, the Council continued to build on these recommendations to advise the Governor’s Office and General Assembly on ways to advance policies that improve the lives of women and girls throughout Illinois. These recommendations also guided events and initiatives led by the Council. Council members understood the power of inclusion; that to successfully turn recommendations into positive outcomes, stakeholders from all walks of life must have a seat at the table.

Lastly, the Council formed an ad-hoc committee to address racial justice and women because of the unequal response from civic leaders and media after incidents of police brutality, wrong raids, and bigotry involving Black women.

Report Structure

This report restates the recommendations that were published in the 2019 Council on Women and Girls Report and discusses the progress that has been made by the Council on the recommendations in each issue area. It concludes with information on the ad-hoc committee that was convened by the Council in June of 2020, as well as an update on state level policy developments that are relevant to the Council’s work.

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Lieutenant Governor Stratton and First Lady MK Pritzker at an Illinois Council of Women and Girls press conference with scholars from the Boys and Girls Club of Springfield – photo taken March 2020

Council Overview and Activities

Created by Law

The goal of the Council, pursuant to the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act (20 ILCS 5130/30), is to advise the Governor and the General Assembly on policy issues and initiatives impacting the lives of women and girls in Illinois. This mandate includes, but is not limited toⁱⁱ:

- Advancing civic participation of women and girls in Illinois;
- Advocating for programs and policies that work to end the gender pay gap and discrimination in professional and academic opportunities;
- Promoting resources and opportunities for academic and professional growth;
- Improving legal protections and recourse regarding sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Reducing violence against women;
- Improving standards of, and access to, healthcare in general and reproductive healthcare in particular;
- Researching the disparate impacts of a lack of access to healthcare on women;
- Improving protections for transgender individuals, especially protections against violence and harassment;
- Increasing fair and equal access to culturally competent healthcare, housing, employment, and other factors related to the quality of life;
- Disseminating information to, and building of relationships with, state agencies and commissions in furtherance of the Council's goals; and,
- Increasing attention around the inclusion of women, especially those of color, in decision-making capacities.

Council Composition

The Illinois Council on Women and Girls is composed of the following 32 members:

- 16 public members appointed by the General Assembly
 - 4 appointed by the House Speaker
 - 4 appointed by the House Minority Leader
 - 4 appointed by the Senate President
 - 4 appointed by the Senate Minority Leader
- 1 representative of the Governor's Office appointed by the Governor
- 4 public members appointed by the Governor
- 11 ex-officio members or their designees
 - Lieutenant Governor
 - Chief of the Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Services, Department of Human Services
 - Director, Executive Director or Superintendent of the following State Agencies:
 - Department on Aging

- Department of Human Rights
- Department of Children and Family Services
- Department of Healthcare and Family Services
- Department of Public Health
- Department of Labor
- State Board of Education
- Board of Higher Education
- Community College Board

Membership

Below are the public members appointed to the Council at the time of the creation of this report. Asterisks denote members that serve as issue-based committee chairs.

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, Chair	Ex-Officio Member
Lilian Jimenez	Ex-Officio Member
Selma D’Souza	Ex-Officio Member
Donna Hardy	Ex-Officio Member
Gaylon Alcaraz	Ex-Officio Member
Director Theresa Eagleson	Ex-Officio Member
Director Ngozi Ezike	Ex-Officio Member
Marina Faz-Huppert	Ex-Officio Member
Jaclyn Matthews	Ex-Officio Member
Director Ginger Ostro	Ex-Officio Member
Natasha Allan	Ex-Officio Member
Deputy Governor Sol Flores	Governor’s Office Representative
Jennifer Lee	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Nikita Richards*	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Veronica Espina	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Ines Kutlesa*	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Rhonda Thomas	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Amanda Bso	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Theresa Forthofer	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Maaria Mozaffar*	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Wendy Pollack	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Aileen Kim	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Dr. Vidhya Prakash*	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)
Monique Garcia	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)
Pamela Althoff	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)

Sylvia Matos-Collins

Public Member (President of the Senate Appointed)

Ibie Hart*

Guest Member

Kelly Fair

Guest Member

Senator Jacqueline Collins

Guest Member

Representative Anna Moeller

Guest Member

*Denotes committee chair/co-chairs

Guest members are individuals who are not formally appointed but who are active with the Council. Guest members do not have a vote in official Council business. Despite this status, they are encouraged to participate in the meetings and can serve on committees formed by the Council on Women and Girls.

The Creation and Convening of the Illinois Council on Women and Girls



Lieutenant Governor Stratton with young women from the Working on Womanhood - Youth Guidance (WOW) program – photo taken February 2020.

Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm said, “You don’t make progress standing on the sidelines.” In that spirit of activism, Illinois Senator Jacqueline Collins and Representative Anna Moeller championed the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act which was signed into law in 2018. The Council began to convene in 2019 and, at the Council’s inaugural event, Governor JB Pritzker

appointed Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton as the first chair of this very necessary Council.

In 2020, the Council held four quarterly meetings, which took place on March 4th, June 3rd, August 26th, and December 16th of 2020, with an additional special meeting on June 23rd, 2020. All meetings after the March 4, 2020 quarterly meeting convened virtually because of Governor Pritzker's Disaster Declaration and Shelter in Place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four committees supplemented the work of the Council specifically addressing the following issue areas: 1.) Gender-Based Violence, 2.) Health & Healthcare, 3.) Leadership & Inclusion, and 4.) Academic & Economic Opportunity. The committees gathered in between council meetings to discuss how well the recommendations were progressing.

Recommendations and Progress Updates

Gender-Based Violence Committee

Sexual and gender-based violence “refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships,”ⁱⁱⁱ including acts of domestic violence. Everyone deserves the right to feel safe and protected in their homes, schools, and workplaces. The Gender-Based Violence committee of the Council is laser focused on reducing brutality against women, girls, and transgender individuals. The committee also looks to build better state-wide resources for residents who are survivors.

Recommendations

The Gender-Based Violence Committee continues to work on the following four (4) recommendations:

- 1) Improving efficiencies for publicly funded crime laboratories to reduce sexual assault-kit backlogs.
- 2) Increasing visibility and support networks by implementing public awareness campaigns about gender-based violence and available resources in rural communities with messaging targeting veterans, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ communities.
- 3) Providing localized accounts of the prevalence of gender-based violence across the State by collaborating with local governments.
- 4) Reducing the overall trauma associated with gender-based violence by ensuring that elementary and secondary school students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of gender-based violence can safely stay in school, succeed academically, and complete their education.

Progress Update:

In 2020, the Gender-Based Violence committee worked on its first recommendation – reducing the backlog of sexual assault-kits in the state of Illinois.

The committee engaged in multiple discussions with the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (“ICASA”) and ICASA’s Executive Director, Carrie Ward, who served on the Governor’s Taskforce on Forensic Science. Working with ICASA made sense because the Governor’s Taskforce on Forensic Science was created to “allow collaborative work of key stakeholders to identify and analyze the issues and challenges that are facing the Illinois publicly-funded crime laboratories.”^{iv}

During the discussions, committee members learned that there are issues with the method used to hire and train forensic scientists; and that these issues, among others, are slowing down how quickly rape kits move through the system. The committee conducted research and found that it often takes eighteen months to finish the hiring process that begins when the job posts and ends

after a successful background check. The Council also discovered through interviews that the hiring process for forensic scientists in Illinois takes longer than the hiring process in states such as Ohio, Florida, and New York.^v

To alleviate this issue, the committee plans to support efforts to make the Governor's Forensic Science Task Force a standing body. This will help address issues with hiring and training practices. The committee also plans to continue the discussions with relevant stakeholders, including the Illinois State Police and Forensic Labs, to determine additional ways to reduce the backlog of rape kits.

Academic & Economic Opportunity Committee

Left out and often boxed out, women face persistent issues with professional equity and representation in every field. Barriers such as racial and/or gender discrimination, often block women from advancing in their educations and careers.^{vi, vii} The Academic & Economic Opportunity committee focuses on policies and programs that will break down these barriers, and build pipelines for women to succeed academically, professionally, and economically. This committee's mission is more crucial than ever because of the heightened financial stress and matchless economic downturn burdening women due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{viii}

Recommendations:

The committee continues to work on the following four recommendations regarding Academic and Economic Opportunity.

- 1) Empowering girls and young women by creating opportunities for them to engage with the executive branch on issues important to their communities.
- 2) Integrating efforts to better serve students and parents on and around Illinois military bases by increasing collaboration among existing institutions, like the Illinois Educational Opportunities for Military Children Council and the Military Economic Development Committee.
- 3) Allowing more women to enter and remain in the workforce by increasing access to affordable childcare, especially for working women and women in school.
- 4) Encouraging girls and women to pursue higher education to increase their wage potential by creating greater opportunities for trauma-informed services for students who experience gender-based violence.

Progress Update:

The Academic & Economic Opportunity committee focused on its first recommendation to bring the voices of girls to the executive branch. The committee began by creating an advisory group that will be linked to the Council. The advisory group is for high school age girls and will be overseen by leaders from the four (4) committees.

This advisory group will join the Council as the “Girls’ Committee”. It will be considered part of the Council on Women and Girls, attending quarterly Council and committee meetings. The Girls’ Committee will provide input on the Council’s existing work, while also pursuing their own projects as a standing committee.

The Academic & Economic Opportunity committee will also work to connect the girls to critical mentorship opportunities, both within and outside of the Council. The goal is to help the girls find ways, big and small, to share the best of who they are with the world while making their families, communities, schools, and our state better.

The Council successfully passed the plan to establish the “Girls’ Committee” during the August 26th quarterly meeting. The plan also provided application guidelines, including steps to ensure that equity and accessibility are a priority throughout the entire process.

The committee’s membership will be diverse, reflecting the racial, religious, regional and cultural makeup of the state. The Girls’ Committee will be goal driven, with a focus on building relationships and developing projects that will advance recommendations of the Council.

Lieutenant Governor Stratton talking with students from Ridgely Elementary School located in Springfield, Illinois – photo taken in February 2020.



Leadership & Inclusion Committee

Far too often, women in professional fields are not given opportunities for leadership, despite owning the same qualifications as their male counterparts.^{ix} The Leadership and Inclusion committee works to construct avenues for women and girls to access leadership opportunities in all fields.

Recommendations:

The committee continues to work on the following three recommendations regarding Leadership & Inclusion.

- 1) Encouraging the involvement of women and girls in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) career pipelines by examining existing and new opportunities for entry. Specifically, opportunities to enter STEAM career pipelines should be focused on access for current and former youth in foster care, youth with disabilities, youth from LGBTQ+ communities, immigrants and refugees, and racially diverse groups.
- 2) Providing school groups the opportunity to understand how engagement in our systems of government can expand opportunities for underrepresented people by utilizing local youth advisory boards led by elected leaders.
- 3) Improving professional opportunities by encouraging the expansion of internships targeting young women through partnerships between schools and high-growth industries.

Progress Update:

The Leadership & Inclusion committee focused on its first recommendation by creating a plan to grow leadership opportunities for girls across the state. This plan, entitled “Illinois Girls Lead”, works to reach girls across the state through mentorship and learning opportunities. It intends to identify and build on leadership skills amongst girls ages 9-18 by creating a curriculum, offering learning experiences, and focusing on competency-based events. These efforts will provide role models, encourage girls to pursue careers in STEAM, create body positive media campaigns, and advance legislation to help address the lack of women in decision making positions.

In 2020, the Committee worked on a plan that would launch the “Illinois Girls Lead” initiative during Spring of 2021. Additionally, the Committee is developing a legislator mentorship program, which will be created in collaboration with members of the Council’s newly established Girls’ Committee. These events aim to focus on uplifting, highlighting, and creating inclusive spaces for girls across Illinois.

Health & Healthcare Committee

Systemic patterns of bias have caused women to experience persistent inequities in both their health outcomes and the healthcare they receive.^x

The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted, changed, and limited access to care for many women.^{xi} The Health and Healthcare committee is tasked with influencing public opinion, promoting ideas, and improving the policies related to health and healthcare access for women and girls in Illinois.

Recommendations:

The committee continues to work on the following three recommendations regarding Health & Healthcare.

- 1) Expanding access to postpartum healthcare coverage to help reduce disparities.
- 2) Increasing access to substance use and mental health services for pregnant and postpartum women to reduce rates of maternal morbidity.
- 3) Highlighting healthcare disparities by improving data collection.

Progress Updates:

The Health & Healthcare committee focused on its third recommendation, which emphasizes improved data collection. This work was guided by the status update in the 2019 Illinois Council on Women and Girls report, as well as the January 2020 Health Disparities Report for Illinois and Illinois Counties.^{xii}

In 2020, committee members utilized the information in the aforementioned reports to convene and discuss the health and healthcare issues disproportionately harming women. These conversations focused on women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and immigrant women in Illinois. The committee then created a proposal to form a Health Equity Working Group. This working group would be built with essential community and statewide organizations committed to representing marginalized groups. The working group will be tasked with increasing access to information on health disparities in Illinois and seeks to accomplish this through a step-by-step process. This process would include improving data collection for marginalized groups, developing a statewide health equity planning coalition, and ultimately generating solutions to alleviate health inequities.

The committee submitted the Health Equity Working Group proposal to the authors of the January 2020 Health Disparities Report for Illinois and Illinois Counties, and then generated a list of stakeholders. Moving forward, the Health and Healthcare Committee will convene these stakeholders to discuss shared values, existing materials, required data, goals, and solutions, as

well as what additional support they will need as the Health Equity Working Group is being developed.

Ad-Hoc Committee on Racial Justice

The murder of George Floyd occurred on May 25th, 2020. In the month following this tragedy, the Council planned a special meeting to address the concerns around racial justice and its effect on women and girls in the state of Illinois. The members discussed ways in which the Council could play a role in dismantling systemic racism by addressing disparate policies and working towards racial justice for women and girls across the state. The Council uplifted the importance of pursuing justice and equity, acknowledging the impact of systemic racism that spans far beyond the criminal justice system.

Gender-Equity Progress in Illinois

In addition to the work of the Illinois Council on Women and Girls' respective committees, in 2020, there were notable developments that had a positive impact on women and girls in Illinois. Much of this progress is directly related to the mission and work of the Council as well as the recommendations made by its committees. It is important to note, that many of these measures were taken to provide crucial support for women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the Pritzker-Stratton administration worked to expand access to the Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP), which helps subsidize the costs of childcare of low-income working families. This expansion included limiting childcare co-pays to 9% of a household's gross income, increasing the initial eligibility for the program from 185% of the federal poverty level to 200% and eliminating the assistance cliff so households would not be taken off CCAP once they reached the program's income limit. From April through June of 2020, co-pays were decreased to \$1 a month for priority essential workers.^{xiii}

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) also provided critical support to women-owned businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. DCEO's Small Business Development Centers served over 9,200 women-owned businesses in 2020 and issued eight Minority-Owned Business Capital Grants to women-owned businesses, totaling over four million dollars. They also distributed 2,788 other grants totaling \$67 million to women-owned businesses.^{xiv}

In addition to these targeted efforts, progress was made toward reducing the sexual assault-kit backlog. On September 30th, 2020 the Illinois State Police launched CheckPoint, an online system that allows survivors to access the status of their evidence during every step of its processing. This new system allows survivors to have more information as they wait for results.^{xv} On December 2nd, 2020, the Pritzker administration announced that Illinois successfully achieved a

48% overall reduction in the Biology/DNA forensic backlog.^{xvi} This came on the heels of multiple initiatives during the previous year concerning practices surrounding data processing, including the creation of the Governor’s Task Force on Forensic Science in 2019, which was mentioned earlier in this report.^{xvii}

Next Steps

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing social inequities along lines of race, class, location, and gender—and we must recognize these disproportionate effects as we look not only towards recovery, but also to a more equitable and just future. To this end, the Council will continue work on its recommendations, partnering with organizations as well as women and girls across the state to continue building the foundation for gender-conscious policy and advocacy. Moreover, working groups that include council members and relevant stakeholders will convene to explore opportunities for collaborative implementation of existing recommendations.

Lieutenant Governor Stratton and Illinois Council on Women and Girls Subcommittee co-chairs speaking at a Women and Girls Town Hall – photo taken March 2020.



Acknowledgements

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Editor's note: discrepancies in how studies obtained data limits continuity for statistics related to sex and gender referenced in this report. This report uses the terms such as women, cisgender women, and female according to terms used from source material for supporting data.

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