

# Close the \_\_\_\_\_ Gap California

Origins and Impact,  
2013-2025

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# Preface

by Susannah Delano, Executive Director of Close the Gap California

The women of Close the Gap know something about *progress*.

Not just the ageless truth that progress is seldom linear, and never guaranteed. But that progress is profoundly *possible*, even in the face of great odds.

**When Close the Gap launched in 2013, women's representation in the California Legislature was tracking to fall to a 20-year low of just 22%.** Representation highs established post-1992 and into the early 2000s had stagnated and begun to backslide. Led by prominent political strategist Mary V. Hughes and a cadre of committed experts and volunteers, Close the Gap was created to reverse the trend.

“The snail’s pace of women’s entry into the California Legislature drove me nuts through much of the 30 years during which I worked to elect women. What was the hold up? And could we design a solution?”

- **Mary V. Hughes**, *Close the Gap Founder*

Hughes and our early allies understood that California had a world-class bench of talented, values-driven women who could lead our state today and our nation tomorrow. Determined not to let that pipeline falter, they designed a solution: **targeted recruiting could be the missing link in our collective efforts to speed up the pace of progress.**

Today, California is poised to become the first top-ten global economy to reach gender parity in its legislature.

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This report will evaluate data and methods underlying the historic 104.3% increase in Democratic women elected to our legislature in just over a decade.

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As a campaign for parity, Close the Gap’s strategy has been to recruit accomplished, progressive women to run for targeted legislative seats.

To date, **27 women we’ve recruited (20 of them women of color) have been elected**, and they have demonstrated that our founders’ ambitious goal of parity by 2028 is far from the long-odds bet so many believed it to be at our inception.

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As we stand at the precipice of fulfilling Close the Gap’s founding mission years ahead of schedule, we’re not stopping here. We are actively investigating not only how to ensure the racially reflective, powerful parity we’re building in California endures for the long term, but also how the recruiting model we’ve deployed here might be adapted to accelerate similar progress in venues beyond the California Legislature.

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Close the Gap seeks to be a resource and a partner for those seeking to replicate the results driven in California. That is why we are thrilled to present the following report authored by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). CAWP’s evaluation helps distill the most powerful elements of our program to inform collective thinking around best practices for increasing equitable representation. In the report, CAWP provides an assessment of how Close the Gap has contributed to representational gains for women in the California Legislature since our launch, with first-person insights into Close the Gap’s impact from our recruits and some of our state’s political leaders.

CAWP’s data influenced our strategy at the very beginning, and its insight as the nation’s leading authority on women and politics could not be more valuable as we look to a future where women seated in equal numbers around the decision-making table is profoundly *normal*.

We believe in the model we’ve battle-tested in California. Its candidate-facing features are unique:

#### KEY DIFFERENTIATORS OF CLOSE THE GAP’S RECRUITING MODEL

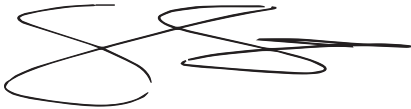
- 1. We are selective:** recruiters research a target district, search for promising candidates, and recruit them. We do not put out open calls.
- 2. We provide highly individualized preparation:** recruiters guide prospective candidates one-on-one through a customized exploration process over the course of a year or more.
- 3. We prepare via tutorial and positioning:** we are not a training program or campaign school. Instead, we educate recruits about the elements of success in politics and public service, and expose them early to the leaders, activists, networks, and allies who influence outcomes.
- 4. We focus on “not just any” women:** we are intentional about recruiting with a progressive values lens and a competency filter, and we prioritize reflectiveness of race, sexual orientation, and more.
- 5. We start early:** our recruiting process runs a full election cycle ahead and ends a full year before filing opens. Timing is key for ensuring the most competitive campaigns.

Based on our experience, we know this model to be scalable and adaptable to swing districts as well as the short runways often demanded by special elections, redistricting, and unexpected incumbent departures.

## KEY PILLARS OF CLOSE THE GAP'S STRATEGY IN CALIFORNIA

- We go where **opportunity** is highest: we recruit only in open seats or winnable purple seats.
- We regularly engage a larger community of **allies**: progressive and women's organizations who share our values play essential roles in our candidate searches, vetting, and programming.
- We maintain a **narrow recruiting focus**: recruiting is our lane, and we stick to it. Being disciplined as a non-PAC has been essential to achieving the recruiting volume necessary for women to continue making fast progress.

*To practitioners and funders who share the restlessness and determination so core to Close the Gap's founding spirit: we invite you to review the insights this report provides, and we hope you will join us in devising new, targeted strategies to speed up the pace of progress for women in politics at every level, nationwide.*



**Susannah Delano**

Executive Director, Close the Gap California

March 14, 2025

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# Close the Gap California Origins and Background

by Sarah Carson, PhD, Director of Research and External Strategy  
at Close the Gap California

Mary V. Hughes, an influential political strategist, writer, and former executive director of the California Democratic Party, founded Close the Gap California in 2013. Equipped with decades of experience as an advisor to candidates for president, Congress, and state and legislative office, Hughes envisioned a strategic model that could tackle the persistent underrepresentation of women in her home state. Informed by academic research and practice-based evidence, **Hughes and the diverse group of leaders that came together to launch CTG identified targeted recruiting as a missing link between potential candidate emergence and gender parity in state politics.**<sup>1</sup>

California voters passed 12-year legislative term limits in 2012, presenting an increased opportunity for non-incumbent candidates to win. Close the Gap's founders calculated that an unprecedented number of seats they deemed the "Motherlode" – 96 of 120 total – would open between 2022 and 2028. California could reach gender parity by 2028 if a qualified woman ran in each winnable, term-limited seat that came open.

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In California and fifteen other states, term limits – which do not exist for the U.S. Congress – allow for greater transparency, anticipation, and planning for upcoming electoral opportunities created through forced departures. Likewise, the decennial process of legislative redistricting – which occurs at both the state and federal levels – also creates increased potential for electoral competitiveness and opportunities.

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Close the Gap's focus on the state legislature leverages state-level rules and processes that create structural opportunities for intervention. While identifying circumstances specific to California, CTG's emphasis on leveraging structural opportunities can be adopted in other states and at other levels of elective office.

From its founding, Close the Gap has pursued the goal of gender parity in the state legislature with a clear and deliberate focus on its distinct role within California's broader system of support for women candidates. California has a strong ecosystem of organizations working to promote women's leadership, including Emerge California, Fund Her, California Women's List, Latinas Lead, A Pipeline Project, Black Women Organized for Political Action, the Los Angeles African American Women's Public Policy Institute, Hispanas Organized for Political Equality, Moms in Office, and the National Women's Political Caucus of California. Within this landscape, Close the Gap plays a unique role by focusing exclusively on targeted recruitment – identifying and preparing strong progressive women to run for the legislature within specific election cycles. Rather than duplicating existing efforts, Close the Gap complements and strengthens the broader movement by ensuring a steady stream of viable candi-



dates who also engage with training, funding, and support networks offered by partner organizations. This strategic approach helps accelerate progress toward gender parity in the state legislature.



Organizational partners present at the founding of Close the Gap included Berkeley Commission on the Status of Women, Black Women Organized for Political Action (BWOPA), California Democratic Party, California Women's List, Emerge California, Latinas Lead, and Planned Parenthood.

## The CTG Model: Targeted Recruiting

Close the Gap targets winnable legislative seats and conducts proactive candidate outreach (as opposed to open calls), individualized coaching, and integration of prospective candidates into a larger support ecosystem via introductions to important players in the networks of California political power. Rather than training women interested in a variety of public offices, who may decide to run now or sometime in the future, CTG begins by identifying a specific winnable seat (either open or flippable) in a specific election year and then recruits qualified, progressive women to run in that district.

**Close the Gap's focus on early, individualized encouragement and coaching is unique among existing organizations working to advance women's political representation.**

Unlike one-time trainings or open call recruitment events, a long and supportive runway allows CTG recruits to build a base of support and connections that are critical to compete in California's state legislative contests. Once a candidate launches, CTG completes its work with that candidate and transitions to recruiting for the next cycle.



### STEP 1: IDENTIFY TARGET DISTRICTS

Close the Gap's targeted recruiting process has five steps. First, the team identifies target districts – defined as open and/or winnable legislative districts – at least one election cycle in advance.<sup>2</sup> The

CTG team conducts research on each district's demographics, traditions, and culture, compiling data necessary to best inform next steps in the recruitment process. Based on this research, they build a profile of the characteristics that would make a strong candidate in each target district. This is key to finding a recruit who is a good match for the district.

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES**

In step two, CTG builds and vets a list of diverse, progressive women with the skills and credibility to run strong in each target district. They rely on a network of recruiters and volunteers across California who are politically engaged, community-centered, and invested in identifying outstanding women in their communities as prospective candidates. These recruiters host search parties with local leaders and diverse members of the progressive coalition in a particular region to crowdsource and vet prospective women candidates, ensuring that they hear about women from all different sectors and backgrounds. At this stage, CTG often begins to build community consensus around women best suited to run and win in target districts.

## **STEP 3: THE "ASK"**

The third step in CTG's targeted recruitment process is the ask. Research shows that encouragement is especially important for women making the decision to run for office.<sup>3</sup> Close the Gap asks prospective candidates to consider running for office, letting them know that their community thinks highly of them. Moreover, CTG offers to walk them through what running would entail and connect them with people who can help them successfully navigate a political campaign. To reinforce this encouragement, CTG often leverages its relationships with allies and elected leaders to generate multiple asks to potential recruits whose names rise to the top of the prospective candidate lists generated in step two of the recruitment process.

## **STEP 4: CANDIDATE EXPLORATION**

Step four of the targeted recruitment process is candidate exploration. At this stage, each prospective candidate is assigned a CTG recruiter to meet with regularly about their possible candidacy. This individualized exploration process, which is provided at no cost to the potential candidate, has three parts:

- 1. Completing a personal and district inventory.** The goal of completing this inventory is to understand what a run will mean for the candidate personally – their families, their careers, their finances – and how the characteristics and dynamics of the district will shape a candidacy.
- 2. Building a base.** Here, CTG walks through the basic elements necessary to craft a campaign, including: establishing policy expertise; telling your story and developing a powerful message; running a campaign; identifying voter and organizational support; and fundraising.
- 3. Preparing prospective candidates to run a Sacramento campaign.** CTG helps prospective candidates develop an understanding of Capitol culture and power centers. Moreover, CTG staff and recruiters introduce prospective candidates to state-based leaders who can make a difference in the decision to launch and the ultimate execution of a state legislative campaign.



One-on-one advising is supplemented by a suite of tools and webinars as well as in-person “symposium” events, where CTG brings together prospective candidates with political leaders and influencers.

### **STEP 5: LAUNCH**

The final step in CTG’s targeted recruitment process is the launch from prospective to declared candidate, at which point CTG’s involvement ends. As a non-PAC 527 political organization, CTG does not endorse or support candidates with funding. Women move from the exploration process into candidacy armed with a new set of connections as well as a CTG launch packet of reminders and recommendations. Included in that launch packet are items like consultant recommendations and lists of endorsing entities for the candidate’s future outreach.

Once a class of candidates is off and running, typically a year before their primary election, CTG turns to assessing conditions and identifying potential recruits for the next election cycle. Maintaining this focus solely on recruiting enables CTG to get off to an early start every cycle.



Close the Gap Symposium event staff, volunteers, faculty, and future legislative candidates, May 2022.

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# Evaluating the Impact of Close the Gap California, 2013-2025

by Kelly Dittmar, PhD, Director of Research at the Center for American Women and Politics  
at Rutgers University

When Close the Gap California (CTG) launched over a decade ago, its primary measure of success was reaching gender parity in the California Legislature by 2028. By that measure, the campaign has nearly accomplished its goal as of 2025. Gender parity was achieved in the state Senate as a result of the 2024 election, and the representation of women in the Assembly is now at 46.3%. Women hold 48.3% of all state legislative seats as of January 2025. But evaluating the campaign's impact requires a more detailed and nuanced look into the many ways in which CTG has contributed to the changing political landscape for and strategic infrastructure available to women – and specifically progressive women – in California.

With over five decades of work tracking women's political representation across the United States and at various levels of office, we at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) are well-situated to evaluate the representational gains for women in California. Moreover, as a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute at Rutgers University, we approach this work with the requisite expertise to apply research standards to program evaluation. Our evaluation was commissioned and informed by CTG and paid for by Close the Gap Institute, a project of Mockingbird Incubator, with CTG providing necessary data to CAWP for its completion and contributing to the parameters and focus for evaluation. CAWP is responsible for the data analysis and written evaluation in the remainder of this report, with CTG's input in review and final approval. The goal of this evaluation is to highlight the campaign's major contributions and possible next steps for CTG, as the campaign contemplates a potential expansion of its recruiting program, and for practitioners with similar goals of advancing women's political representation.

In this report, we offer an assessment of how women's political representation and power in the California Legislature has increased at the same time that CTG has increased its capacity and reach. Beyond the numbers, interviews with CTG recruits, programmatic partners, and key political practitioners in the state provide valuable insights into CTG's impact and its potential.

Isolating the impact of any one organization or effort within the process of candidate emergence is difficult. Individuals consider and ultimately launch candidacies (or not) within broad ecosystems whereby many factors, actors, and points of intervention shape decision-making and outcomes. Close the Gap is both an actor within California's political ecosystem and an entity working to help women navigate the ecosystem itself.

The most direct measures of CTG's impact include the numbers and diversity of progressive women recruited and guided by CTG, including those who went on to serve in the legislature. But there are also many sites for impact that are difficult to measure and not reflected in this report.



The May 2024 passage of SB 233 allowing Arizona doctors to provide abortion care to Arizona patients in California was a priority for the Legislative Women’s Caucus, including pictured Close the Gap legislators Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Senator Aisha Wahab, and Assemblymembers Lori Wilson and Dawn Addis.

First, while we document the many women who decided to run after an exploration process with CTG, there are many more women who engaged with the campaign only to decide that candidacy was not the right path for them either at a distinct political juncture, at a distinct moment in their lives, or ever. These decisions *not to* run for office should not be seen as a failure of CTG’s process. In fact, strategic recruitment is meant to yield the most fit and ready candidates; learning prior to launch that a prospective candidate does not (yet) fit that bill is important for the campaign and the prospective candidate alike.

There is also deep value in the type of candidate recruitment and emergence work that CTG does in its capacity to both guide and prepare women for offices other than state legislator. Access to information and expertise might ensure that a prospective candidate identifies an office that is best aligned with both their policy and political goals, as well as one that might offer the greatest strategic opportunity and ideal timing for the prospective candidate.

Finally, while so much of politics is focused on short-term change, what cannot yet be measured fully is CTG’s long-term impact on building a more robust support pipeline for progressive women in California politics, a pipeline that will serve prospective women candidates for decades to come.

This report demonstrates the multiple types of valuable contributions that CTG has made to not only women’s political success at the state legislative level, but also to building a reliable and targeted support network at the earliest stages of candidate emergence. While our evaluation is limited in its ability to capture data on the widespread impact of a campaign whose reach goes beyond any one cycle or site of political advancement, our findings demonstrate the utility of a state-based, strategic, and comprehensive campaign focused on women candidate recruitment and emergence. Close the Gap’s commitment to success is evident in their request for evaluation of its work to date and desire to identify areas for future growth and partnership. Finally, this report offers important insights and best practices for other advocates and practitioners seeking to advance equitable political representation across levels of office and in states and localities nationwide.



Close the Gap Senators Lola Smallwood-Cuevas (left), Caroline Menjivar (second from left), and Aisha Wahab (right) are sworn into office in 2022.

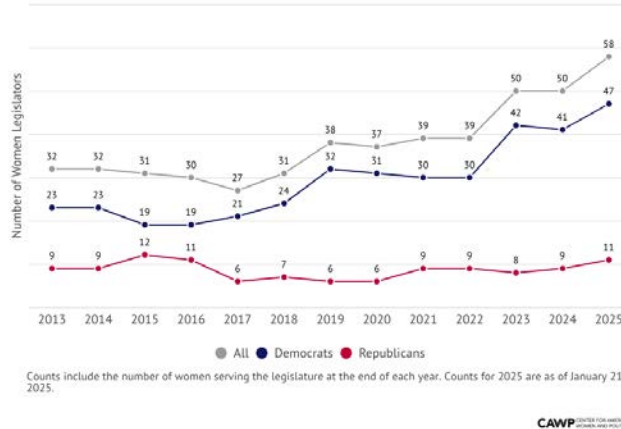


Close the Gap then-Assemblymember (now Senator) Eloise Gómez Reyes distributing community resources early in the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

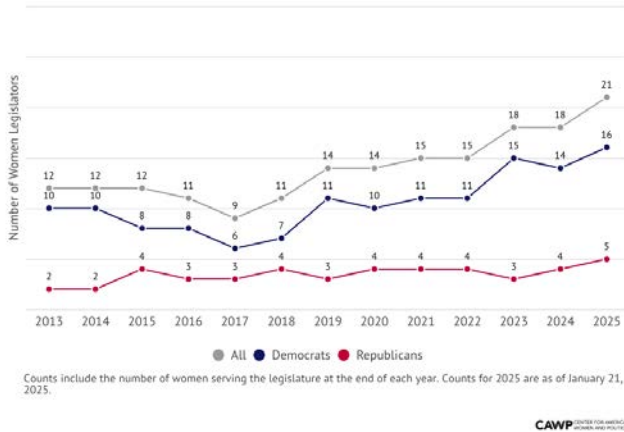
## Women’s Representation in the California Legislature, 2013-Present

From 2013 – the year that CTG was launched – to 2025, the number of women in the 120-member California Legislature increased by more than 80%. Women went from holding 26.7% of legislative seats at the end of 2013 to 48.3% of seats at the start of 2025. In the 80-member state Assembly, women’s representation increased from 25% to 46.3%, and women’s representation in the 40-member state Senate jumped from 30% to 52.5%.

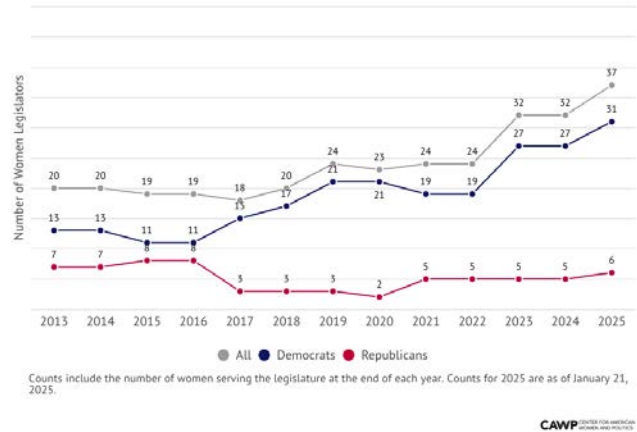
**Number of Women in the California State Legislature, 2013-2025**



**Number of Women in the California State Senate, 2013-2025**



**Number of Women in the California State Assembly, 2013-2025**



As a result of these gains, California ranks fourth nationwide in women’s state legislative representation, up from 19<sup>th</sup> in 2013. The increase in women’s state legislative representation in this period is greater in California than in all but seven other states. Among those seven states with greater percentage gains in women legislators, only two – Nevada and New Mexico – rank higher than California in women’s state legislative representation today.



# Change in Women State Legislators by State and Party, 2013-2025

\*Sorted by Percentage Gain in Democratic Women Legislators, 2013-2025

State	Democratic Women Legislators in 2013	Democratic Women Legislators in 2025	Net Change in Democratic Women Legislators 2013-2025	Percentage Gain in Democratic Women Legislators 2013-2025	All Women Legislators in 2013	All Women Legislators in 2025	Net Change in All Women Legislators 2013-2025	Percentage Gain in All Women Legislators 2013-2025
Alaska	4	11	7	175.0%	17	26	9	52.9%
New Mexico	18	46	28	155.6%	32	60	28	87.5%
Oklahoma	7	17	10	142.9%	20	35	15	75.0%
Virginia	17	38	21	123.5%	25	49	24	96.0%
Michigan	18	40	22	122.2%	28	58	30	107.1%
Pennsylvania	21	46	25	119.0%	45	82	37	82.2%
California	23	47	24	104.3%	32	58	26	81.3%
North Carolina	19	38	19	100.0%	36	51	15	41.7%
Nevada	15	28	13	86.7%	18	39	21	116.7%
Texas	20	37	17	85.0%	38	61	23	60.5%
New York	38	67	29	76.3%	47	73	26	55.3%
Washington	30	51	21	70.0%	47	65	18	38.3%
Delaware	13	22	9	69.2%	16	23	7	43.8%
Georgia	36	60	24	66.7%	54	81	27	50.0%
Arizona	18	29	11	61.1%	32	43	11	34.4%
Maryland	44	70	26	59.1%	57	78	21	36.8%
Rhode Island	28	44	16	57.1%	31	48	17	54.8%
Illinois	41	64	23	56.1%	55	77	22	40.0%
Wisconsin	22	34	12	54.5%	34	44	10	29.4%
Missouri	23	33	10	43.5%	43	57	14	32.6%
Oregon	19	27	8	42.1%	26	40	14	53.8%
New Jersey	23	32	9	39.1%	35	40	5	14.3%
Kansas	19	26	7	36.8%	39	54	15	38.5%
Colorado	30	41	11	36.7%	42	51	9	21.4%
Utah	11	15	4	36.4%	17	32	15	88.2%
Connecticut	36	49	13	36.1%	54	65	11	20.4%
Ohio	16	21	5	31.3%	31	45	14	45.2%
Kentucky	13	17	4	30.8%	26	41	15	57.7%
Minnesota	43	55	12	27.9%	68	74	6	8.8%
Florida	22	28	6	27.3%	41	69	28	68.3%
Massachusetts	45	57	12	26.7%	52	62	10	19.2%
Maine	43	53	10	23.3%	56	79	23	41.1%
Hawaii	22	27	5	22.7%	24	31	7	29.2%
Indiana	15	18	3	20.0%	31	40	9	29.0%
Louisiana	12	13	1	8.3%	18	34	16	88.9%
Alabama	13	14	1	7.7%	19	26	7	36.8%
Vermont	58	62	4	6.9%	74	78	4	5.4%
Montana	28	29	1	3.6%	41	51	10	24.4%
Arkansas	10	10	0	0.0%	23	28	5	21.7%
North Dakota	10	10	0	0.0%	24	37	13	54.2%
Wyoming	3	3	0	0.0%	15	24	9	60.0%
South Carolina	11	10	-1	-9.1%	22	22	0	0.0%
Tennessee	11	10	-1	-9.1%	23	23	0	0.0%
Idaho	10	9	-1	-10.0%	27	28	1	3.7%
South Dakota	7	6	-1	-14.3%	24	39	15	62.5%
Iowa	25	21	-4	-16.0%	36	41	5	13.9%
New Hampshire	104	87	-17	-16.3%	140	152	12	8.6%
Mississippi	18	9	-9	-50.0%	31	26	-5	-16.1%
West Virginia	11	2	-9	-81.8%	22	15	-7	-31.8%
Nebraska	Nonpartisan	Nonpartisan	Nonpartisan	Nonpartisan	10	14	4	40.0%

Counts include the number of women serving the legislature at the end of each year. Counts for 2025 are as of January 21, 2025.

## DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Close the Gap's focus on recruiting progressive women for the state legislature means that their direct impact is on Democratic officeholders. California ranks seventh nationwide for its representational gains among Democratic women legislators from the end of 2013 to January 2025. While there has been fluctuation over the more than eleven years in the numbers of both Democratic and Republican women within and across California's state legislative chambers, Democrats have seen a significantly larger net gain in women legislators from 2013 to 2025 than Republicans. In fact, the number of Democratic women state legislators has more than doubled (+104.3%) from 23 in 2013 to 47 today. In contrast, the 11 Republican women state legislators serving today is just two more (+22.2%) than served in 2013.

Close the Gap's work has contributed to representational gains for Democratic women that have quite literally *closed the gap* with men both among their party's officeholders and across the legislature. When broken down further by chamber, Democratic women's representation has increased in both the state Assembly and state Senate by number, percentage of chamber, and percentage of party caucus from 2013 to present.

### Gains for Women in Democratic-Controlled State Legislatures, 2013-2025

State	Percentage Increase in Democratic Women State Legislators, 2013-2025	Percentage Increase in Women State Legislators, 2013-2025	Women as a Percentage of All State Legislators in 2025
California	104.3%	81.3%	48.3%
Delaware	69.2%	43.8%	37.1%
Maryland	59.1%	36.8%	41.5%
Rhode Island	57.1%	54.8%	42.5%
Illinois	56.1%	40.0%	43.5%
Oregon	42.1%	53.8%	44.4%
New Jersey	39.1%	14.3%	33.3%
Massachusetts	26.7%	19.2%	31.0%
Hawaii	22.7%	29.2%	40.8%
Vermont	6.9%	5.4%	43.3%

States listed represent the ten states whose legislatures were Democratic-controlled for the entirety of the period between 2013 and 2025. Values reflect the percentage increase in women state legislators from 2013 to 2025 in each state. Values for 2013 are the number of women serving the legislature at the end of the year and values for 2025 are as of January 21, 2025.

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Comparing aggregate counts of women by party, however, ignores important shifts in the partisan breakdown of all state legislators over this period. Evaluating women's representation among legislators of their own party better accounts for the growing Democratic majority in the California Legislature, especially since 2019. Women were just under 28% of all Democratic state legislators



in 2013 and are more than half (52.2%) of the party's officeholders in 2025. And while Republican representation has declined overall in the legislature during this period, women are nearly 40% of Republican officeholders today, up from one quarter of all Republican legislators in 2013. Together, these bipartisan gains contribute to the upward trajectory for women's overall representation in California's state legislature.

Another cut at the data reveals that from 2016 to 2025, when the Democratic majority increased from 65.8% to 75% or more of all legislative seats, women were responsible for more than half (55.4%) of all Democrats' non-incumbent wins in state legislative elections (special or regular). This pattern is consistent across chambers, where women were more than 50% of all non-incumbent Democratic winners in Assembly and Senate elections across this period.

California is one of only ten states where state legislative party control across both chambers was Democratic for the entirety of the period between 2013 and 2025 and the only state among them with term limits. Among those ten Democratic-controlled states, California ranks first for both its percentage gain in Democratic women legislators and its percentage gain in all women legislators for this period. This indicates that women – and the organizations supporting them – were able to capitalize on Democratic success, as well as structural opportunities, to increase their representation in the party with the greatest power in the California Legislature over the past decade.

### **EXPLAINING THE GAINS FOR DEMOCRATIC WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA POLITICS**

In addition to analyzing the data on women's representation in the California legislature from 2013 to present, we spoke with 19 individuals who have expert insight into these gains. We interviewed nine CTG recruits (including seven who now serve in the legislature), two former women state legislators, and eight other California political practitioners – including advocacy and party organization executives, political strategists, and women's group leaders – to gather their perceptions of women's political progress in the state and the role of CTG.<sup>4</sup> Before asking specifically about CTG's work and influence, we asked these experts what they viewed as the most significant contributors to the increase in Democratic women's representation over the past decade.

Consistent with national trends, many interview subjects pointed to key cultural and political moments – including the #MeToo movement, Hillary Clinton's presidential nomination and subsequent loss to Donald Trump, and the organization of women's marches nationwide – that amplified attention to women's political underrepresentation and motivated more targeted action to remedy it. Research has demonstrated the influence of these events for women candidate emergence, particularly in spurring a record number of Democratic women running and winning elective office in election 2018.<sup>5</sup> Mobilization around racial violence and inequities – heightened through the Black Lives Matter movement and response to murders of Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, among others – has also motivated candidacies over the past decade.

Multiple interview subjects argued that two structural realities distinct to California – the top-two primary system and state legislative term limits – have created opportunities for more women to run and win. The top-two primary system, adopted in 2010, allows more than one member of the same party to advance to the general election. In strongly Democratic districts, this can increase the chances that a lesser-known or less-resourced candidate is given more time to make their case to voters. California's state legislative term limits, including reforms imposed as of 2012, also ensure greater – and predictable – turnover in legislative representation.

Term limits mandate legislator departures after a set period of time, both creating open seats and providing more certainty for when those open seats will arise. Early expectations were that term limits would be a positive structural intervention to increase women’s political representation, disrupting the long-established male dominance in state legislatures. But research evaluating term limits’ impact on women’s representation nationwide has been mixed, with some studies finding benefits to women in certain settings,<sup>6</sup> while others have found a decrease in women’s representation after term limits were adopted.<sup>7</sup> Still other researchers have found no difference in women’s representational gains between state legislatures with and without term limits.<sup>8</sup>

## Gains for Women in States with Legislative Term Limits, 2013-2025

State	Percentage Increase in Democratic Women State Legislators, 2013-2025	Percentage Increase in Women State Legislators, 2013-2025	Women as a Percentage of All State Legislators, 2025
Oklahoma	142.9% (7 to 17)	75.0% (20 to 35)	23.5%
Michigan	122.2% (18 to 40)	107.1% (28 to 58)	39.2%
California	104.3% (23 to 47)	81.3% (32 to 58)	48.3%
Nevada	86.7% (15 to 28)	116.7% (18 to 39)	61.9%
Arizona	61.1% (18 to 29)	34.4% (32 to 43)	47.8%
Missouri	43.5% (23 to 33)	32.6% (43 to 57)	28.9%
Colorado	36.7% (30 to 41)	21.4% (42 to 51)	51.0%
Ohio	31.3% (16 to 21)	45.2% (31 to 45)	34.1%
Florida	27.3% (22 to 28)	68.3% (41 to 69)	43.1%
Maine	23.3% (43 to 53)	41.1% (56 to 79)	42.5%
Louisiana	8.3% (12 to 13)	88.9% (18 to 34)	23.6%
Montana	3.6% (28 to 29)	24.4% (41 to 51)	34.0%
Arkansas	0.0% (10)	21.7% (23 to 28)	20.7%
South Dakota	-14.3% (7 to 6)	62.5% (24 to 39)	37.1%
Nebraska	Nonpartisan legislature	40.0% (10 to 14)	28.6%

States listed represent the fifteen states with legislative term limits in effect during the period of study. Values reflect the percentage increase in women state legislators from 2013 to 2025 in each state. Parenthetical notations reflect the number of women serving at the end of 2013 and the number of women serving as of January 21, 2025; numbers of women officeholders fluctuate during that period but percentage increase reflects the net gain from start to end of this period.

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California is one of 15 states where term limits were in effect for the full period between 2013 and 2025.<sup>9</sup> The percentage gain in women state legislators across these 15 states ranges from 21.4% to 116.7% from the end of 2013 to January 2025. California ranks third of 15 for gains in Democratic women state legislators and fourth of 15 states with term limits for the percentage gain in all women state legislators in this period. The variance in findings may be due to many factors, including time, in-state dynamics, and political context. Notably, California is home to the only term-limited state legislature that was controlled by Democrats for the entirety of the period between 2013 and 2025, likely increasing the opportunities for Democratic women in comparison to other states.

Increasing open seats will only yield more representation of women if women are recruited, prepared, and supported to contest those seats. All of the California political experts we interviewed pointed to organizations committed to this work as critical to gains in Democratic women’s representation over the past decade. They include: the Women’s Legislative Caucus; women’s political organizations and PACs that engage in recruitment, training, or financing – including those that target women within distinct and diverse identity groups; and Democratic women’s clubs. Together, these organizations, which former California Women’s List Board President Marissa Roy described as “a constellation of organizations that have really made a concerted effort to focus on women,” represent a robust support infrastructure for women in California politics.

In 2019, CTG played a leading role in bringing many of these organizations together to form a coalition committed to helping progressive women in politics. Members of the coalition, called the California Victory Network, work to share information, maximize efforts, and discuss strategy to advance women’s political representation in the state. Roy described the network as a “force multiplier” for supporting women and credited political strategist Danielle Cendejas and CTG with leading this effort. She told us, “I think Close the Gap is really a leader in convening us...[and] is probably the organization that does most to kind of bring everyone together.”



“I think Close the Gap is really a leader in convening us...[and] is probably the organization that does most to kind of bring everyone together.”

- **Marissa Roy**, *Former California Women’s List Board President*



Close the Gap team and partner organization representatives celebrating the historic achievement of gender parity in the California State Senate, December 2024.

## Close the Gap Successes, 2013-2025

When we asked women officeholders, CTG recruits, and other California political practitioners whether they viewed CTG as a part of the support infrastructure for women in the state, the answer was overwhelmingly “yes.” California Democratic Party Executive Director Yvette Martinez answered, “Yeah, if a woman came to me and asked for help networking or thinking about running for office, I would definitely steer them to Close the Gap.” Mike Young, executive director at California Environmental Voters, described the “success story” of electing values-aligned women to office, explaining, “I don’t know how you genuinely tell [that story] without bringing up Close the Gap.”

To better illuminate CTG’s contributions to and influence on California’s support infrastructure for women and politics, we asked the same experts what they view as the most important types of support that CTG provides prior to women’s campaigns and, relatedly, the most effective strategies they have employed to increase women’s political representation. In their responses, they emphasized:

- the importance of CTG’s strategic and targeted recruiting;
- their role in providing information, mentoring, and even psychological support to potential candidates;
- their capacity to connect recruits with practitioners, potential donors, and other women navigating state politics;
- their value as a validator and amplifier for their recruits; and
- their skill in collaborating with and influencing organizations and individuals to advance Democratic women’s representation in California.

### TARGETED RECRUITING

Assemblymember Dawn Addis, a CTG recruit who was first elected in 2022, told us that CTG’s recruitment efforts were essential in her path to the legislature. Andrea Dew Steele, founder of Emerge California and Emerge America, added that CTG’s targeted, strategic recruitment is their most effective strategy. She explained of that approach, “It is so essential, and they’ve proven...that it really works when you are as targeted as they are.”

The strategic approach employed by CTG requires long-term planning, including monitoring seats that will open, identifying potential women recruits for that contest, and cultivating that recruit over time. Former Assemblymember Cristina Garcia, who has supported and worked with CTG, described this “forward thinking” as one of CTG’s greatest strengths. Explaining that CTG is not just thinking about the current election cycle, she explained, “They’re thinking multiple cycles ahead.” Assemblymember Mia Bonta, a CTG recruit who was first elected in 2021, commended CTG on this aspect of their work. “I think it’s also an art to be able to have the foresight to start looking six years before a seat comes up and starting to have conversations with people,” calling this “a very strong pipeline development function.”



“I think it’s also an art to be able to have the foresight to start looking six years before a seat comes up and starting to have conversations with people.”

- Mia Bonta, Assemblymember

In addition to identifying and cultivating recruits *early*, CTG is recognized and celebrated by state-based experts for their commitment to *community-based* recruitment. California Women’s List’s Marissa Roy described CTG’s “hyper-local recruitment model,” whereby they rely on conversations with community organizations and leaders to identify and reach out to potential recruits, as one of its greatest strengths. She told us, “They are not just plucking someone and saying this person should run for office. They’re really talking to people who already have a very deep network and record of community service and just helping them see themselves more as an elected leader.” Assemblymember Lori Wilson, a CTG recruit first elected in 2022, credited CTG’s cultivation of a recruitment team as helping “it be a program that is heads above others,” explaining that CTG recruiters “are very knowledgeable leaders in the community” and “keep up to date on trends.” Providing an example of this type of recruitment, Assemblymember Addis described how, soon after being elected to city council, she was first approached by a former county supervisor who had previously explored a state senate campaign. That woman – Linda Seifert, a volunteer recruiter for CTG – invited her to a CTG symposium event, setting in motion a process that ultimately led to her winning a state legislative seat four years later.

Multiple people we spoke with also credited CTG with building a recruitment program that pushed back against traditional gatekeeping forces within the state. Strategist Danielle Cendejas explained, “There [are] so many people who just tell these women, ‘It’s not going to happen, sweetheart. We’ll support you in another race.’” She added, “Close the Gap is there to say, ‘No, we’re going to give you the skills and we’re going to give you the tools to say you can do this. We’re going to put you in the right hands, and we’re going to make sure...that you’re prepared for this and that you have an understanding of what’s coming.’” By fostering connections with advocacy organizations and community leaders, CTG is able to tap into networks of potential recruits that might otherwise fall outside of “traditional” recruitment circles.



“Close the Gap is there to say, ‘No, we’re going to give you the skills and we’re going to give you the tools to say you can do this. We’re going to put you in the right hands, and we’re going to make sure...that you’re prepared for this and that you have an understanding of what’s coming.’”

- Danielle Cendejas, *Strategist*

## PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

As noted in the origins section of this report, CTG offers preparation and one-on-one coaching to potential women candidates through multiple modes. At group symposiums, potential recruits are introduced to information and experts – including women who have run for state legislative office and other political strategists and leaders – that provide clarity into what their experience would be like as a candidate and as an officeholder. As one expert told us, this information also helps to demystify candidacy and officeholding, offering honest insights and tactical guidance on building a campaign team, fundraising, and other key aspects of running a successful campaign. Additionally, these events often provide potential recruits with direct connections to political practitioners who might help them if/when they decide to launch a campaign and if/when they serve in the legislature.



Close the Gap's one-on-one mentoring and advising further helps to fill information and preparation gaps faced by potential recruits. Multiple CTG recruits praised the support they received from their recruiters, who maintained contact with them over the course of their preparation and decision-making process. Recruiters provide expertise, hold potential recruits accountable, and reliably answer the many questions that arise when considering candidacy. According to some, recruiters and CTG leaders also provide psychological support to potential recruits who are navigating both internal and external hurdles en route to candidacy. Recruits shared that they valued the responsiveness of these experts and the lack of judgement in providing answers to questions that may seem self-evident to people with more political experience. Marissa Roy described CTG's dedicated, one-on-one support as "the reason that a lot of these candidates can launch in a very strong way and build campaigns that are viable."

Finally, the CTG recruits we spoke with expressed gratitude for CTG's role in moving them from considering candidacy to ultimately making the decision to run. Assemblymember Wilson described the role they played in her decision to run in a special election:

When it came to decision making, it really was Close the Gap. ...Most people announce two years before they run for a seat. ...I was really, really concerned about not whether I could do it in terms of capability but whether there was enough time to do it. And they were like, "You got this," basically. ...They sat me down. They were like, "Look, this is the part of the training, and this is how you use this, and this [is] how you truncate it." ...I had that meeting. I felt good [and] came home to my husband and I was like, "Let's go."

Elaborating on the preparation that she received in previous sessions with CTG, Wilson explained that CTG's ability to eliminate as much uncertainty as possible is both electorally beneficial and boosts recruits' confidence to launch a campaign.

Elizabeth Betancourt, a CTG recruit who first ran in 2019, said that conversations with her CTG recruiter, CTG leadership, and other women recruits she met through CTG helped her to work through questions and concerns she had before she declared candidacy. "It was like, 'Oh, there's enough people vested in me running for this that they will give me access to existing power brokers to help me think through these questions,'" she told us, adding, "And it, to me, was indicative that there would be investment to come if I decided to run." Succinctly characterizing this contribution from CTG to its recruits, Betancourt told us, "I think that they really fill an important role in terms of getting women to actually do the thing."

Former Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson described CTG as "a clearinghouse of opportunity" for women in California politics. And former Assemblymember Cristina Garcia affirmed that CTG's preparation has been vital to building strong candidates. She explained that when CTG recruits ultimately launched campaigns and sought support from the California Legislative Women's Caucus, for which she was a previous chair and is a current consultant, they were already well-prepared and polished. She praised the CTG preparation process, saying, "These folks before me [were] building the package for us."



## CONNECTIONS, VALIDATION, AND AMPLIFICATION

Even before launching their candidacies, CTG recruits are provided access – through CTG events and personal introductions – to practitioners, prospective donors, and other women navigating state politics. Close the Gap recruits described how their CTG connections provided an entrée to discussions with political consultants, organizational leaders, and even potential donors who might back their campaign. Describing one of CTG’s recruiters critical to her own decision to run in 2022, Assemblymember Gail Pellerin said, “Having her by my side was all I needed as a ticket to get into a conversation, to meet important people.” Elizabeth Betancourt also noted the positive reputation of CTG leaders, suggesting, “Just saying ‘I’m a Close the Gap candidate,’ I think, ...opened some doors.” Assemblymember Wilson agreed, “There’s a credibility that is lent to you by being part of this organization and having gone through the program.” That credibility and validation is paired with amplification, as CTG leverages their own communications and relationships to be sure that individuals and organizations are aware of their recruits once any candidacies are launched.



“There’s a credibility that is lent to you by being part of this organization and having gone through the program.”

- **Lori Wilson**, *Assemblymember*

That credibility and amplification extends to potential donors. While CTG does not provide direct financial support to candidates, their early backing of a recruit can signal to donors which candidates to support. Their relationships with funding organizations, including women-targeted PACs, also benefit their recruits. As multiple recruits and experts acknowledged, CTG offers myriad types of support – guidance on finance needs and fundraising practices, identifying and mapping recruits’ existing networks, and exposure to additional donor networks – without engaging in any direct financing. Also included among that assistance is CTG’s coaching on how potential recruits can leverage their own networks of support.

Finally, through programming, mentoring, and a growing alumni network, CTG is also building a “sisterhood” among women who have already or are currently navigating California politics. Assemblymember Wilson described the “sense of camaraderie with other women” as very helpful. Likewise, Assemblymember Pellerin said, “Having those sisters in the trench with you, supporting you, lifting you up, encouraging you to keep going, telling you to shake it off when it’s a tough day, and just really believing in you – I think that that’s so critically important.” Reflecting on the mentorship and coaching she received, Assemblymember Mia Bonta told us, “It mattered a lot that I had women specifically rooting for me, and I think that that kept me kind of – I’ll use the word deliberately – accountable to my campaign, right? I wasn’t just doing it for myself. I was doing it because there were a lot of people who were rooting for me along the way.”



“Having those sisters in the trench with you, supporting you, lifting you up, encouraging you to keep going, telling you to shake it off when it’s a tough day, and just really believing in you – I think that that’s so critically important.”

- **Gail Pellerin**, *Assemblymember*

## **COLLABORATION AND INFLUENCE**

As noted above, CTG and its leadership are credited with acting as primary conveners of many women's political organizations in California. In so doing, they ensure that there is a more seamless transition of their recruits from the early mentorship they provide to organizations that can offer more tailored resources and supports to declared candidates. At the same time, by viewing other political organizations as allies instead of competition, CTG promotes less duplication of efforts and more maximization of resources available to women within California's political ecosystem.

Beyond organizations focused specifically on increasing women's political representation, CTG has expanded their outreach to advocacy and issue-based organizations that can also serve as allies in candidate recruitment and support. Multiple people we interviewed credited CTG with working to build trust among these groups by inviting them to participate in and/or observe their processes and events, as well as by engaging in difficult but necessary conversations around issues- and values-alignment. While these organizations might not always support CTG recruits who go on to run, leaders we spoke with suggested that a sense of trust and shared commitments with CTG has contributed to synergy and positive outcomes.

Moreover, in addition to their work directly recruiting candidates, Ludovic Blain, executive director of the California Donor Table, credits CTG with "being a force around ensuring that...there's an intersectional gender lens applied to the full slate of [Democratic] candidates with corrective interventions when the gender mix is not good." He told us:

It's actually helping people think through their own slates – basically a labor slate, the environmental slate – and then making sure that one of the lenses they have on reviewing those slates before they're done, when they're getting crafted, is a gender lens. And I think that that's as impactful as one group doing it themselves. You're actually helping everybody else treat their sexism as it's manifesting in their candidate slate development process.

Interviews with leaders of labor, environmental, and party organizations back this sentiment, noting the consciousness-raising aspect of CTG's work that is strengthened by relationship-building.

## **SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS**

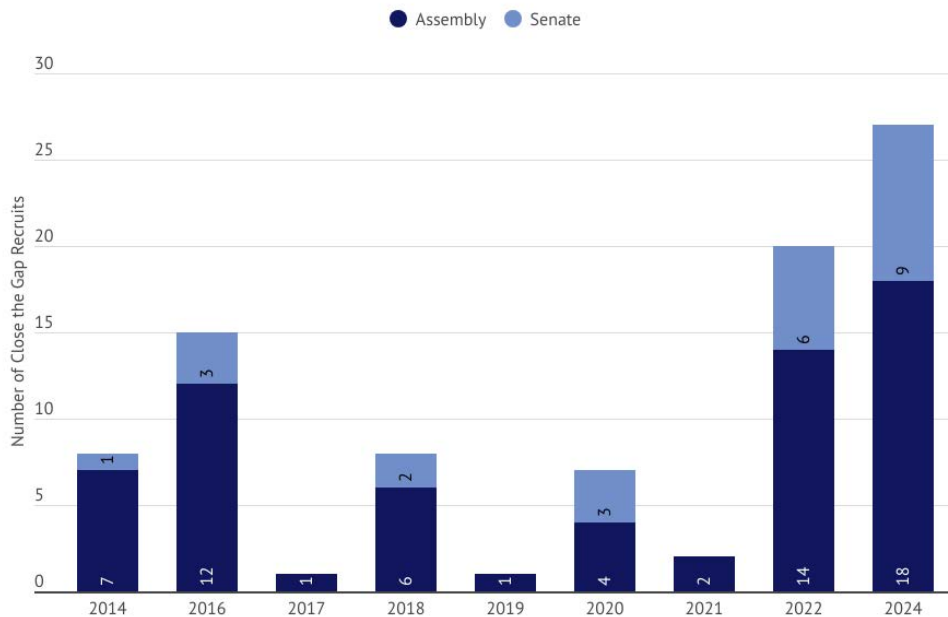
The supports provided and strategies employed by CTG have yielded success, which can be measured – in part – by the numbers. Since its founding, CTG has increased both its number of recruits and the diversity among them. And, as envisioned at the founding of the campaign, CTG was able to significantly increase the number of recruits going on to serve in state legislative office by taking advantage of the high volume of open seats created by term limits and redistricting in 2022 and 2024, such that more than half of CTG winners first entered office since 2022.

## Recruits

The value of CTG’s targeted recruitment process comes in its ability to identify and guide progressive women in specific contests identified as winnable by the organization. For the purposes of this report, CTG recruits by cycle include individuals who launched a state legislative campaign after spending time one-on-one with CTG staff and/or attended a CTG recruitment event as a prospective candidate immediately prior to that election cycle and with a primary focus on the contest for which they ran that cycle.<sup>10</sup>

### Close the Gap CA Recruits By Year, 2014-2024\*

\*Odd-numbered years reflect off-year, special election contests.



Values reflect the number of all CTG recruits (2014-2024) in each year, including recruits who ran in off-year, special election contests. For the purposes of this report, CTG recruits include individuals who launched a state legislative campaign after spending time one-on-one with CTG staff and/or attended a CTG recruitment event as a prospective candidate immediately prior to that election cycle and with a primary focus on the contest for which they ran that cycle.

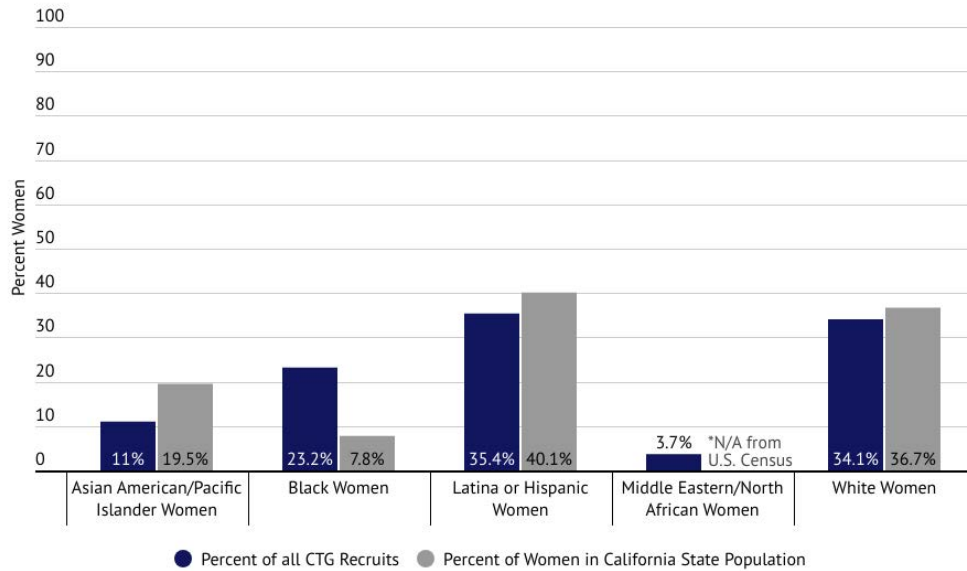
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Based on these parameters, CTG has recruited 82 women for 89 discrete state legislative candidacies between elections 2014 and 2024.<sup>11</sup> At the individual level, 62 recruits have launched campaigns for the state Assembly and 24 have run for the state Senate; four women recruits have run in both Assembly and Senate contests. All are Democrats.<sup>12</sup>

Of the 89 candidacies launched by CTG recruits between 2014 and 2024, more than three-fourths have been for open seats. All but two have been in what CTG has identified as target districts, which include 159 districts in both regular cycle and special elections where legislative seats are either open or deemed flippable from Republican to a progressive Democrat. After redistricting, criteria for target districts expands to account for the opportunities for non-incumbents created by new district lines. Close the Gap has recruited one or more women who ultimately launched campaigns in nearly 50% of those target districts in the past decade, with the greatest saturation by far in election 2024. Notably, CTG does not recruit in target districts when a qualified, values-aligned woman steps up to run independently and prior to their recruitment process.

According to CTG records of self-reported race/ethnicity, of 82 individual women recruits, nine are Asian American/Pacific Islander, 19 are Black, 29 are Latina or Hispanic, three are Middle Eastern/North African, and 28 are white. Women who identify as more than one race (6) are included in all groups with which they identify. Close the Gap recruits reflect the full racial/ethnic diversity of California’s population. Likewise, in a state where 5.1% of the adult population identifies as LGBT, at least 14 (16.9%) CTG recruits identify as LGBTQ.<sup>13</sup>

## Close the Gap CA Recruit Representativeness by Race/Ethnicity



Values reflect the percent of all CTG recruits (2014-2024) and the percent of all of California’s adult state population of women that identifies in each racial/ethnic group. Population data is drawn from U.S. Census 2023 population estimates. Due to differences between CAWP/CTG and U.S. Census coding for race/ethnicity, population data for white women only includes white, non-Hispanic women while CAWP/CTG recruit counts for white women include women who identify as white and Latina. While CAWP and CTG include Middle Eastern/North African among the racial identities coded for recruits and officeholders, the U.S. Census does not yet include this racial/ethnic category.

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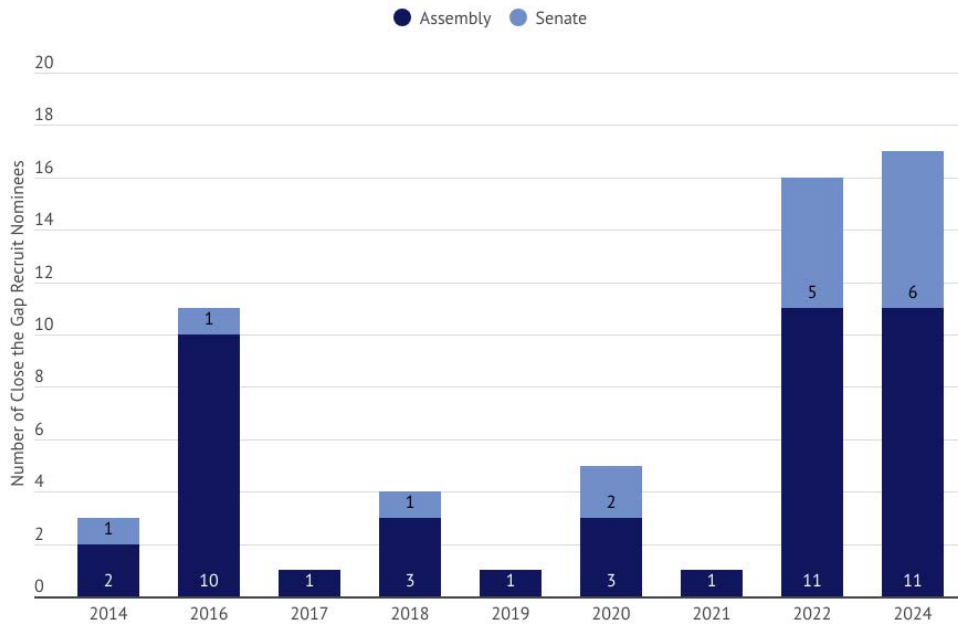
The numbers of CTG recruits are greatest in 2016, 2022, and 2024. As expected, based on CTG’s targeted recruitment approach, the number of recruits is informed by the magnitude of open seats in each election year, with 2016, 2022 (the first post-redistricting year since CTG’s launch), and 2024 notable in those opportunities. Another contributor to CTG’s recruit count is organizational capacity, which has grown in recent years and likely bolstered the campaign’s ability to both leverage opportunities in 2022 and continue momentum into 2024.

## Nominees

Fifty-three of the 82 (64.6%) CTG recruits since 2014 advanced to the general election, three of whom became nominees in both Assembly and Senate contests during this period.<sup>14</sup> Close the Gap recruits are responsible for 35.1% of all nominations of non-incumbent Democratic women in special or regular cycle elections from 2014 to 2024, with their greatest representation among even-year non-incumbent Democratic women nominees in 2016 (40.7%), 2022 (43.6%) and 2024 (60.7%).

### Close the Gap CA Recruit Nominees By Year, 2014-2024\*

\*Odd-numbered years reflect off-year, special election contests.



Values reflect the number of all CTG recruits (2014-2024) who advanced to the general election in each year, including recruits who ran in off-year, special election contests. In these counts, special election primary winners with 50% or more of vote are considered general election nominees even if no general election was required. For the purposes of this report, CTG recruits include individuals who launched a state legislative campaign after spending time one-on-one with CTG staff and/or attended a CTG recruitment event as a prospective candidate immediately prior to that election cycle and with a primary focus on the contest for which they ran that cycle.

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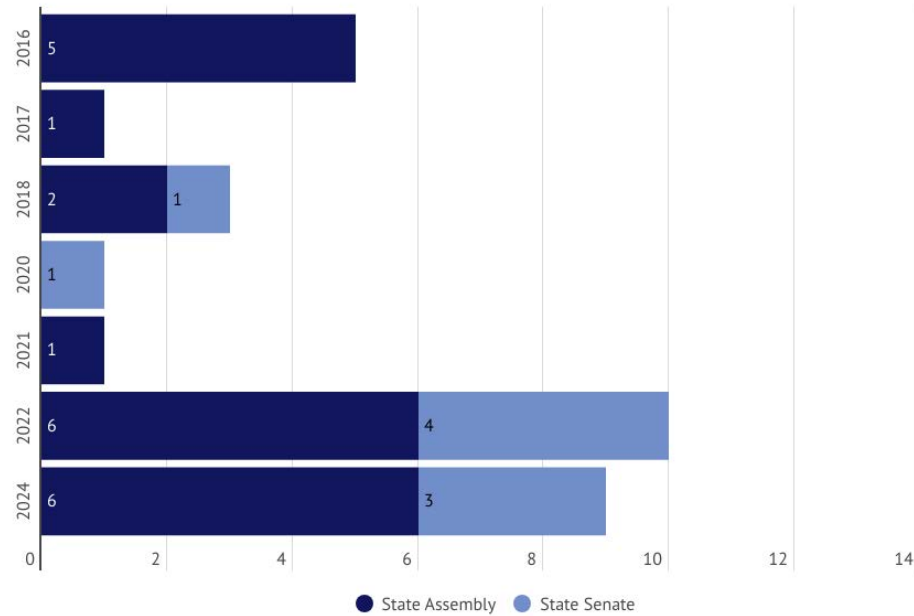
More specifically, CTG recruits advanced to the general election in 57 of 78 (73.1%) target district contests in which they ran. They were nominees in 35.8% of *all* 159 target districts identified by CTG between 2014 and 2024. Outside of target districts, a CTG recruit advanced in one other contest in this ten-year period.

## Winners

Twenty-seven of the 82 (32.9%) CTG recruits from 2014 to 2024 have gone on to serve in the state legislature.

### Close the Gap CA Recruit Wins by Election Cycle, 2016-2024\*

\*Odd-numbered years reflect off-year, special election contests.



Counts reflect the number of women winning state legislative contests who were recruited by Close the Gap California in that cycle. Counts add up to 30 but reflect 27 individual women, including three women who were recruited by Close the Gap California for both their Assembly and Senate contests in two different election cycles.

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Among these 27 legislators, 21 worked with CTG prior to launching their bids for the California State Assembly and nine worked with CTG prior to launching state Senate campaigns. Included in these counts are three women legislators who have been successful CTG recruits in both their Assembly and Senate campaigns. Of the 30 total contests in which these women competed, 25 were for open seats and five had CTG recruits defeating incumbents in either a primary or general election. Reflective of the growth in capacity that aligned with the organization's strategy to identify and leverage electoral opportunities created through term limits and redistricting, the greatest number of women winners emerged in the 2022 (10) and 2024 (9) elections. In these two years, CTG recruits won 19 state legislative contests, representing more than half of all CTG recruit wins since 2013.

Of all the Democratic women who won as non-incumbents in regular or special state legislative elections between 2014 and 2024, 30 of 66 (45.5%) wins were achieved by CTG recruits. And of all 136 Democratic non-incumbent winners in this period, including women and men candidates, 30 (22.1%) are CTG recruits.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-nine of 30 wins by CTG recruits were in CTG-identified target districts, securing victories in 29 of 78 (37.2%) target districts in which they ran and 18.2% of all target districts between 2014 and 2024.



## Current CTG Legislators\*

\*as of January 2025



**Assembly Majority Leader  
Cecilia Aguiar-Curry**  
AD 4 | 2016 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Lori Wilson**  
AD 11 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Rhodesia Ransom**  
AD 13 | 2025 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Rebecca Bauer-Kahan**  
AD 16 | 2018 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Mia Bonta**  
AD 18 | 2021 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Catherine Stefani**  
AD 19 | 2025 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Diane Papan**  
AD 21 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Gail Pellerin**  
AD 28 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Dawn Addis**  
AD 30 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Pilar Schiavo**  
AD 40 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Celeste Rodriguez**  
AD 43 | 2025 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Blanca Rubio**  
AD 48 | 2016 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Jessica Caloza**  
AD 52 | 2025 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Sade Elhawary**  
AD 57 | 2025 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Tina McKinnor**  
AD 61 | 2022 - Present



**Assemblymember  
Dr. Darshana Patel**  
AD 76 | 2025 - Present



**Senator  
Aisha Wahab**  
SD 10 | 2022 - Present



**Senator  
Melissa Hurtado**  
SD 16 | 2018 - Present



**Senator  
Caroline Menjivar**  
SD 20 | 2022 - Present



**Senator  
Monique Limón**  
SD 21 | 2021 - Present



**Senator  
Sasha Renée Pérez**  
SD 25 | 2025 - Present



**Senator  
Lola Smallwood Cuevas**  
SD 28 | 2022 - Present



**Senator  
Eloise Gomez Reyes**  
SD 29 | 2016 - Present



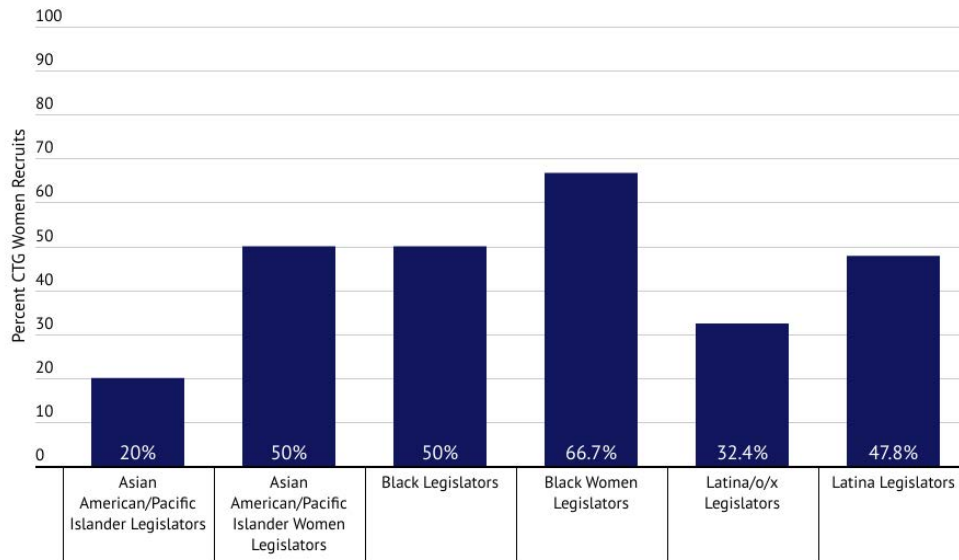
**Senator  
Sabrina Cervantes**  
SD 31 | 2016 - Present



**Senator  
Catherine Blakespear**  
SD 38 | 2022 - Present

The representation of Black women and Latinas among CTG-guided legislators surpasses their representation in California’s state population. For the first time in 2024, two Asian American women CTG recruits won state legislative seats. Overall, 13 legislators they have recruited identify as Latina or Hispanic, seven identify as white, six identify as Black, two identify as Asian American, and one identifies as Middle Eastern/North African. These counts include two women legislators – state Representatives Mia Bonta (D) and Sade Elhawary (D) – who identify as both Black and Latina.

## Close the Gap CA Women as a Percent of California's Democratic State Legislators by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, January 2025



Values reflect Close the Gap CA women recruits by racial/ethnic group as a percentage of all Democratic and Democratic women legislators with the same racial/ethnic identification. While CAWP and Close the Gap track legislators who identify as Middle Eastern/North African, this data is not provided in the legislator demographic data provided by the California State Library that is relied upon here as a primary source for determining male legislator racial/ethnic identification. Counts used to determine percentages are as of January 21, 2025.

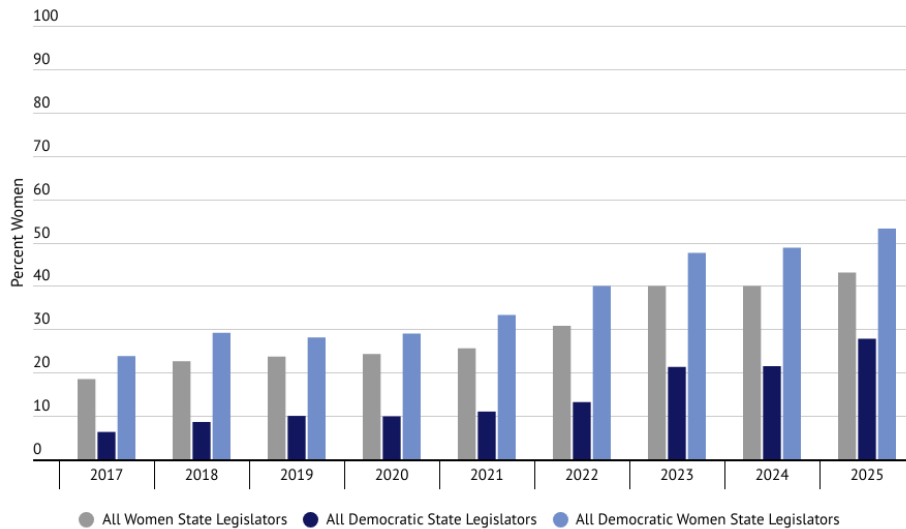
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November 2023 “Party for Parity” event attendees, including current CTG electeds and then-candidates running in the Class of 2024.

Four of the 27 (14.8%) successful CTG recruits identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. As of January 2025, they are 28.6% of all members and 100% of women members of the legislature's LGBTQ Caucus.<sup>16</sup> There is also generational diversity among the women legislators recruited by CTG. Their ages have ranged from 29 to 62 when they were first elected and the average age at election among all CTG winners is 45.

### Close the Gap CA Women as a Percent of California State Legislators, 2017-2025



Values reflect Close the Gap CA women recruits as a percentage of all women, all Democrats, and all Democratic women in the state legislature as a whole. Counts used to determine percentages include the number of women and men, by party, serving in the legislature at the end of each year. Counts for 2025 are as of January 21, 2025.

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As of January 2025, 25 of 27 CTG recruits who have gone on to serve in the legislature are currently serving.<sup>17</sup> They represent over half of all Democratic women, 43.1% of all women, and 27.8% of all Democrats in the legislature. Sixteen of 25 CTG winners currently serve in the Assembly, where they represent 51.6% of Democratic women, 43.2% of all women, and 26.7% of Democrats. Finally, CTG recruits are 56.3% of Democratic women, 42.9% of all women, and 30% of all Democrats in the state Senate. As the number of CTG women increases and they represent larger proportions of party and chamber membership, their potential to both access and exercise institutional power and influence grows.



Senate Committee Chairs and CTG Class of 2022 members Caroline Menjivar, Catherine Blakespear, and Lola Smallwood-Cuevas in 2024.

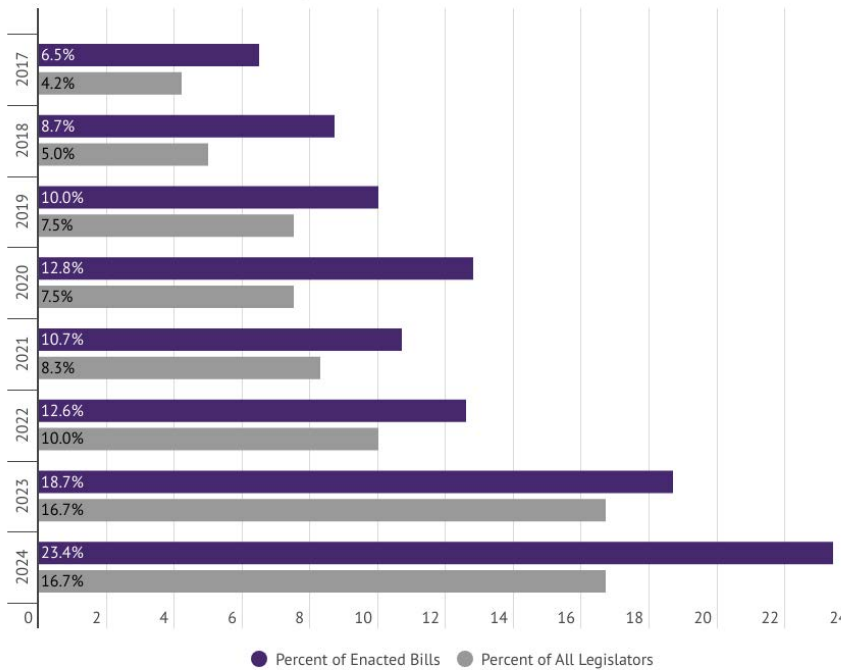
## Close the Gap Women Legislators' Impact in the California Legislature

Institutional power and influence come not only in women's presence within the state legislature, but also through their ascendance to leadership positions. In 2025, five of the 25 CTG recruits in the California Legislature hold in-chamber party leadership positions. They hold three of 10 (30%) majority leadership positions in the Assembly and two of eight (25%) majority leadership positions in the Senate. Additionally, more than two-thirds of CTG recruits in the legislature are already chairing standing committees, including nine in the Assembly and eight in the Senate. In these roles, they have the capacity to more directly shape agendas, deliberation, and legislative progress. Amber Parrish, executive director of UFCW Western States Council, elaborated on this value of increasing women's representation in legislative leadership. "Those leadership positions matter a lot," she explained, "They define the priorities of the caucus. They look at what bills get to the governor's desk. They have the relationships within the caucus that I think shapes the party and shapes what issues we're focused on."

### SUBSTANTIVE POLICY OUTCOMES

California's women legislators, including CTG recruits who have served or currently hold office, have leveraged their power across a broad swath of public policy debates. Specifically, CTG recruits have been successful in moving legislation through to enactment. In every year that CTG recruits have served in the legislature, the percentage of enacted bills on which they have been lead authors has exceeded their representation in the legislature.<sup>18</sup>

### Close the Gap CA Women Legislative Impact Lead Authorship of Regular Session Enacted Bills, 2017-2024



Values reflect Close the Gap CA women recruits as a percentage of lead authors on all enacted bills in each year's regular state legislative session, compared to their representation among all California state legislators. Counts used to determine percentages of all legislators include the number of women serving in the legislature at the end of that year's regular session.



When we asked CTG recruits to share some of their proudest policy achievements with us, their lists of legislative successes were long. While multiple women emphasized legislative wins related to issues of gender equity and advancement – including preserving reproductive rights and protecting women’s health – the vast range of issue achievements should serve as a reminder that women’s impact is not constrained to any one area. Among these achievements are CTG recruits’ legislative wins on: internet for all, telehealth, infrastructure and housing, food security, ballot reform, hospital seismic safety, guardrails around artificial intelligence, farmworker housing, removing the statute of limitations on child sexual assault, and addressing mental health.

Asked about the value of increasing women’s legislative representation, former Assemblymember Cristina Garcia told us, “We legislate on experience,” noting the distinct experiences of women at intersections of gender and race/ethnicity, among other identities. She described the nuances that women bring to policymaking by applying intersectional lenses of analysis, as well as the sense of urgency they bring to address persistent disparities in voice and outcomes. Assemblywoman Gail Pellerin provided an example in the work that she did to fund diaper banks statewide. Noting how essential diapers are to families, she explained, “Women come in having lived through these issues, having understood these issues and how difficult they are, and so we are there, advocating for them and demanding that we get the funding that we need.” She added, “Having more women in the legislature that support this and hear about these things and raise a stink about it, the better off we’re going to be.”

Senator Monique Limón, a CTG recruit in both 2016 (Assembly) and 2020 (Senate), channeled this energy to combat pay inequity during the 2022 legislative session. The *Pay Transparency for Pay Equity Act* (SB 1162), which was signed into law in September 2022, requires that employers with 15 or more employees include salary ranges on all job postings. The goal of pay transparency is to protect against already-proven gender and racial bias in wages and thus narrow gender and racial pay and wealth gaps. Upon passage of the bill, Senator Limón celebrated, “This is a big moment for California workers, especially women and people of color who have long been impacted by systemic inequities that have left them earning far less than their colleagues.”<sup>19</sup>

Describing the value of increasing diversity in the California legislature, Assemblymember Pilar Schiavo, a CTG recruit in 2022, explained, “I think at the end of the day you see the Black Caucus, or you see the Women’s Caucus, or the Latino Caucus, really focusing on issues that heavily impact that community...so you see how important it is to have those voices because you don’t know if it would happen if they weren’t there. You don’t know if that focus would be there if they weren’t there, and if we weren’t here.” Like Assemblymember Pellerin, she noted, “The more [representation] you have, the more power you have to move an agenda and pass bills and make things actually happen.”



“The more [representation] you have, the more power you have to move an agenda and pass bills and make things actually happen.”

- **Pilar Schiavo**, Assemblymember



In the 2024 legislative session, CTG recruit Assemblymember Lori Wilson served as chair of the Legislative Black Caucus and member of the Women’s Caucus. Among the bills she championed via both caucuses was an act (AB 2319) to amend the *California Dignity in Pregnancy and Birth Act* by clarifying which healthcare providers are subject to implicit bias training. It also specified that the training should include “recognition of intersecting identities and the multiple layers of potential biases that could come into play, resulting in harm to patients and their infants.”<sup>20</sup> Assemblymember Wilson, who co-sponsored the bill with then-Assemblymember Akilah Weber Pierson (now a member of the California Senate), described what motivated her to move this legislation: “Black women in California face alarming disparities in maternal health outcomes. As a Black mother and as chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus, the fight to improve these outcomes is personal to me.”<sup>21</sup> The legislation was signed into law in September 2024.



“I think absolutely we have some of the best policies in the country, and I absolutely think we would not have some of those landmark policies – whether it’s paid leave or requiring corporations to have a certain number of women on boards – all of these things are because of the incredible representation of Democratic women in California.”

- **Andrea Dew Steele**, *Founder of Emerge California and Emerge America*

## ALTERING EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

The impact of increasing women in the California Legislature is not limited to policy outcomes. Diversity in representation can disrupt expectations of who can and should hold positions of leadership and power – whether inside or outside of government – and inspire those with shared identities to consider their own capacity for political leadership. Former Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson pointed to this type of symbolic representation of women officeholders in California, telling us, “I think a lot of these women have set examples of how to use power [and] how to embrace it... and [provide a] real opportunity for younger women to have role models.” When asked specifically about the progress for Black and Latina women in California politics, Assemblymember Mia Bonta also described the influence and value of seeing and speaking with others with shared identities who have navigated the same political ecosystem. She responded:

I think I’d attribute that to...[an] overall sense of being able to, one, identify somebody who has run before, who looks like you, or comes from a similar experience – just pure representation, [someone] who looks like me. I think it also matters to have people who you know and can more easily reach out to and have a different kind of affinity with to understand and know whether or not the actual running is going to be something that you can do. ...It’s been very powerful to be able to talk to women who are considering running and just have those real conversations with them that probably I wouldn’t necessarily have had myself with, quite frankly, a white woman candidate or elected, or a male candidate.

These conversations reflect the type of support CTG is able to provide through its network of recruits-turned-legislators.

## BUILDING A NETWORK OF WOMEN OFFICEHOLDERS

While CTG does not work directly with its recruits once they officially launch their campaigns, their recruits remain part of their network of women leaders. Among them, those who have gone on to serve in the legislature act as mentors and advisors to future recruits. Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, a CTG recruit who entered office in 2016, described her willingness to support CTG's efforts from her leadership role, noting, "Whenever they ask me to do something, I don't even think twice. I just go do it." Those asks range from participating in events, helping to identify or evaluate potential recruits, or being "brutally honest" to women considering a bid for office.

DeJonaé Shaw, a 2024 CTG recruit, offered perspective as a recipient of this type of support from sitting women legislators. She described how Assemblywoman Tina McKinnor and Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, both former CTG recruits, organized an event for a group of Black women candidates in Sacramento, providing access and exposure to political influencers and practitioners. Noting how they "were able to pave the way for us," Shaw's experience demonstrates the continued return on CTG's investment.

The desire to support other women in politics is a sentiment shared among all of the CTG recruits we spoke with for this report. In fact, Assemblymember Pellerin expressed her hope to be a "Close the Gapper" for other women in the way that CTG leaders were to her. She told us, "It's like that poem of the woman that climbs to the top of that mountain, and then you turn around and you lift the next person up because that's what it's all about. You don't get to the top of the mountain and just celebrate [and] bask in your glory. You gotta... lift the next person up." Legislators who were recruited by CTG do not only provide this support to CTG recruits. They have found multiple outlets to act on the inspiration provided by CTG, including supporting local organizations committed to promoting women's leadership and increasing diversity in political representation, as well as taking time to speak with young people to encourage the next generation of women leaders.

As the number of women in the California Legislature, and the diversity among them, grows, the opportunities for inspiration, affinity, and support from inside the legislature also increase. In contributing to these gains, then, CTG's impact goes beyond the number of recruits who run or win. Their work contributes to substantive policy outcomes, altering expectations of who can and should lead, and building a network of women officeholders committed to encouraging and supporting other women political leaders.



From left: Now-State Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, Close the Gap Executive Director Susannah Delano, and now-Assemblymember Tina McKinnor, May 2022.

## Best Practices and Opportunities

Part of our inquiry included asking about the aspects of CTG's work that could be replicated outside of California. In-state experts' responses inform this list of best practices that emerged from our qualitative and quantitative analyses of CTG's work. But many of the same insiders emphasized that there is work left to do *in California*, and they suggested that CTG is a critical player in not only sustaining gains already made but continuing growth in women's political representation in the state. Their suggestions provide a basis for opportunities laid out below, which focus on potential areas of growth or evolution in CTG's work as they near accomplishment of their founding mission of achieving gender parity in the California Legislature.

**“I think that they've provided a real roadmap, a very vital model, that should be used all over the country. It really should be.”**

- **Andrea Dew Steele**, *Founder of Emerge California and Emerge America*

**“I think that we're gonna hit parity in the state legislature...and I don't want to see Close the Gap go away...for a couple of reasons. I think, unfortunately, ...we could lose parity as fast as we gained it if we are not having constant attention to promoting women's leadership. ...On a second level, I think that parity is not necessarily the end all be all. ...Their work is so needed beyond parity.”**

- **Marissa Roy**, *former Board President of California Women's List*

### BEST PRACTICES

#### **Targeted and strategic recruitment that engages in early candidate identification and sustained candidate cultivation.**

Close the Gap's recruitment model is among its most celebrated and effective practices. Relying on local and community experts, identifying electoral opportunities (target districts) and potential recruits well in advance of an election, and cultivating recruits through honest, sustained, and specified communications and support are key pillars of this model commended by recruits, recruiters, and other practitioners. The comprehensive preparation and support offered to potential recruits at this stage are critical to their ability to make well-informed decisions about whether or not to run. This early and “dogged” style of candidate identification and cultivation – as Assemblymember Mia Bonta described it – helps to fill a gap in the women candidate emergence process, especially where existing recruitment paths fail to capture potential recruits with diverse backgrounds, identities, and priorities.

#### **Building and leveraging relationships with political practitioners, community leaders, potential donors, and party officials to support recruits and maximize impact.**

Relationship-building is central to CTG's work, both with potential recruits and with individuals and organizations that help to identify, cultivate, and support those recruits before and after they make

the decision to run for office. From its founding, CTG's leadership has leveraged and fostered lasting connections with political practitioners, community leaders, potential donors, and party officials to maximize their impact. These individuals – often deeply ingrained within the state's political ecosystem – provide valuable insights and guidance to CTG and its potential recruits. And even when their advice might not align with CTG goals or decisions, their expertise helps to prepare CTG and its recruits for challenges that lie ahead. Finally, the connections that CTG provides between these individuals and its recruits often result in strategic and tactical support, financial support, and candidate validation and/or endorsement once a potential recruit launches their campaign.

### **Alignment, coordination, and integration with organizations who share goals and values.**

Close the Gap functions within an existing network of organizations similarly invested in candidate recruitment and selection. Among those organizations are others focused specifically on increasing women's political representation. Close the Gap has worked in coalition with these organizations, building from shared goals and recognizing the value of synergy among groups that offer diverse resources to women at different stages of the campaign process. Their approach ensures that recruits benefit from the full range of supports available in the existing infrastructure, and its role as a convener promotes efficiency instead of duplication of efforts.

In addition to women's political organizations, CTG has fostered relationships with advocacy and party organizations with vested interests in California's state legislative elections. Working with these organizations, for whom increasing women's political representation is not a primary goal, requires that CTG (and other women's political organizations) be attentive to other opportunities for alignment of values, goals, and political and/or policy priorities. While this alignment is not always possible, leaders of some of these organizations credited CTG for dedicating time and energy to building trust and goodwill among organizations committed to electing progressive champions in labor, environment, and other issue areas. Ludovic Blain, executive director of the California Donor Table, described how moving beyond a pure identity focus "allowed a greater alignment between [Close the Gap] and other folks for whom identity wasn't the sole mobilizing factor," adding, "That actual ability to align enabled folks to focus on adding more women as a part of a progressive initiative, as opposed to a parallel thing to progressive initiatives." In engaging with the complex and sometimes difficult work of values alignment, CTG has expanded their potential for influence among organizations otherwise less attentive to gender disparities in representation.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Increase integration and collaboration with organizations with shared values.**

While many of the California political leaders we spoke with praised CTG for their work to engage and work with advocacy and party organizations, they also saw opportunity for growth in this area. They recommended even more communication, especially at early stages of recruitment and strategic planning, as well as increased integration of efforts. This integration might include offering potential recruits policy-specific education and training. This can be accomplished by CTG inviting advocates who bring myriad points of view and priorities in any one issue area. Earlier communication and planning might also reduce the likelihood of values misalignment between allied organizations and CTG recruits, according to some advocates. And while CTG is poised at times to provide support to potential women recruits when party organizations and/or leaders do

not, continuing to build relationships with allied party leaders can increase CTG's influence and lower hurdles that some of their recruits may confront.

### **Move beyond gender parity in numbers to promote disruption of established power allocation and dynamics.**

Close the Gap's mission is to close the gender gap in the California Legislature by 2028. As noted in this report, it is well on its way to accomplishing this mission. But gender parity in numbers does not always yield gender parity in power. Multiple people we interviewed emphasized the importance of promoting women's leadership and influence once they enter the legislature as a next phase of this work. While it may not be in the purview of CTG's current mission, this work can further maximize the positive policy and institutional impact of their recruits-turned-legislators. Consistent with other research on women's political power, California practitioners called for more support to women *officeholders* on how to navigate and build political power *within* governing institutions.<sup>22</sup> One advocate pointed out, "While there [are] candidate pipelines, there aren't governing pipelines," adding, "The successes of Close the Gap have created new, first-world problems of what you do with all these [women officeholders]? How do you maximize their success?" Assemblymember Bonta also called for greater attention to organizational change and institutional shifts, recognizing how many women officeholders are encouraged to operate "like men" to uphold the institutional norms and practices. She told us, "For me, the next stage of this work is how do you ensure that we're building out a pipeline but then also changing the institution by virtue of this representation," adding that this requires "courageous conversations."

**"For me, the next stage of this work is how do you ensure that we're building out a pipeline but then also changing the institution by virtue of this representation."**

- Mia Bonta, Assemblymember

Further cultivating the alumni network, providing continued education, and creating spaces for honest and difficult conversations are some possible modes for officeholder support. This investment could have additional representational effects, as state legislators populate other pipelines for statewide and federal office.

Disrupting established power dynamics – both in legislatures and in campaigns – also requires buy-in and allyship from men. As one advocate told us, "Most programs train the folks that are oppressed so that we can have more of them, but no programs train the other people to not do bad things to those folks." They described the value of programming for those people to promote "harm reduction" in ways that reduce the burdens of sexism and racism on women navigating that state political ecosystem.

### **Leverage network and relationships to expand in-state reach across levels of office.**

The best practices derived from CTG's success to date could be applied in other states across the U.S., but many we interviewed also recognized the value of expanding CTG's work to the local level within a state where they can leverage their existing network and relationships. Close the Gap could also promote recruitment of women to statewide and federal offices. These types of expansion would require significantly more resources and bandwidth, and working outside of state



legislative elections would remove some of the of advanced notice of opportunities created by term limits. Instead of CTG shifting focus itself, they could continue to advise and support other women's political organizations already working at these levels to build pipelines and increase representation for women at all levels of California politics.

## Conclusion

Women's representation and capacity for influence has increased in the California Legislature since CTG launched its campaign in 2013. Among the women who have entered legislative office during this period are 27 CTG recruits, and another eighty-plus launched candidacies after going through CTG's exploration process. Our quantitative and qualitative analyses help to reveal the magnitude of CTG's success and best practices contributing to it, and they show the myriad types of impact that this twelve-year campaign has had on California politics. Uplifting the success of women legislators, and the women's political organizations that support them, is an important part of making the case for continued work to promote women's political progress.

Recognizing that the work to promote gender parity in representation and power in California politics is far from complete, we also outline opportunities for growth or evolution in efforts – by CTG or others – to remedy the inequities that remain. None of this work can be done without additional and sustained support, including the type of financial investment that remains limited in women's political organizations. That investment is needed to build organizational bandwidth, sustain organizations in the long-term, and maximize their capacity for outreach and influence.

We hope that this report inspires and informs continued efforts – by CTG, within California, and across the United States – to promote women's political representation and power as well as investment in these efforts.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Research published prior to Close the Gap's launch found that recruitment, especially from electoral gatekeepers, significantly increased women's likelihood of both considering candidacy and taking at least one concrete step toward it (Lawless and Fox 2010; Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009). The same research found gender disparities in recruitment and encouragement, with men more likely than women to experience both. Seeing recruitment as a missing link in the candidate support ecosystem, CTG founders worked with CAWP on The 2012 Project, which focused on targeted recruitment of women candidates in winnable contests nationwide. Lessons learned from that nonpartisan project, as well as the research that backed its strategic approach, informed the founding of Close the Gap California in 2013. Lawless, Jennifer, and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; Sanbonmatsu, Kira, Susan J. Carroll, and Debbie Walsh. 2009. *Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

<sup>2</sup> Districts with Republican incumbents are deemed as "winnable" if their determined Republican advantage per the California Target Book is three percent or less.

<sup>3</sup> In their survey of state legislators, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) found that almost twice as many women as men were pure recruits, meaning that they ran for their first elective office because of encouragement instead of making the decision entirely or partially on their own. Moreover, they identified political actors – party officials and/or legislative leader or elected or appointed officeholders – as the most influential sources of encouragement. Carroll, Susan J., and Kira Sanbonmatsu. 2013. *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> CAWP staff conducted outreach via email between August and December 2024 to individuals identified by CTG as aware of or engaged with their work. Multiple follow-ups were attempted via email and phone, resulting in 19 accepted invitations and completed interviews. All but one interview was conducted via Zoom and interviews ranged between 30 and 75 minutes, with interviews averaging about 48 minutes. Interview topics included perceptions of contributions and barriers to women's political progress in California, impressions and evaluations of CTG's work and impact, and insights into the need for and impact of gender and other types of diversity in state legislative representation. Former and current officeholders were also asked about their own experiences navigating candidate emergence and political campaigns, as well as their proudest achievements while in office. To promote candor and preserve objectivity, CTG was not involved in the interview process or in analysis of interview data. Interviews were conducted based on the confidentiality preferences of each interview subject and only CAWP, as primary investigator, has access to any interview content provided on background or off the record.

<sup>5</sup> Dittmar, Kelly. 2020. "Urgency and Ambition: The Influence of Political Environment and Emotion in Spurring U.S. Women's Candidacies in 2018." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 3(1): 143-160.

<sup>6</sup> O'Regan, Valerie, and Stephen Stambough. 2018. "Term Limits and Women's Representation: a Democratic Opportunity and a Republican Dead-End." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6(4): 650–665; Thomas, Sue, and Clyde Wilcox. 2014. *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Carroll, Susan J., and Krista Jenkins. 2001. "Do Term Limits Help Women Get Elected?" *Social Science Quarterly* 82(1): 197-201.

<sup>8</sup> Caress, Stanley M., and Todd T. Kunioka. 2012. *Term Limits and their Consequences: The Aftermath of Legislative Reform*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

<sup>9</sup> Term limits were enacted in North Dakota in 2022, bringing the total number of states with term limits to sixteen. Current data available via National Conference of State Legislatures: <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/the-term-limited-states> (accessed August 20, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Here, immediately prior refers to the period between the previous election and the filing deadline for the election year indicated for this case. Included among these recruits is a small number of women who launched candidacies but ultimately withdrew from their contests.

<sup>11</sup> Some recruits have run for more than one contest over this period.

<sup>12</sup> Three women were CTG recruits for Assembly contests in two different election cycles. Two CTG recruits dropped their candidacies between launch and the primary election.

<sup>13</sup> UCLA Williams Institute. 2023. "Adult LGBT Population in the United States." Available: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/adult-lgbt-pop-us/>

<sup>14</sup> Another three recruits won nominations to the Assembly in more than one cycle. In California special elections where candidates secured 50% or more of the vote, no general election is held but winners are still counted as nominees in these calculations.

<sup>15</sup> These counts include discrete wins, not individual winners. Individual candidates who won more than one contest as a non-incumbent are counted for each of those wins in this period. For CTG recruits, the 30 wins by non-incumbents represent 27 individual women.

<sup>16</sup> For the latest data, see the LGBTQ Caucus' membership list, available: <https://lgbtqcaucus.legislature.ca.gov/members>

<sup>17</sup> In 2024, CTG recruits Wendy Carrillo and Luz Rivas did not run for re-election to the California Legislature. Rivas ran successfully for the U.S. House of Representatives, beginning her congressional term in January 2025.

<sup>18</sup> This data comes from the California Legislature's bills enacted reports, which include bills enacted in regular session for each year. The designation of "lead author" can go to one or more legislators, as well as to committees. For the purpose of this research, committee-authored bills have been removed from the analysis.

<sup>19</sup> Office of Senator Monique Limón. 2022. "Newsom Signs Transformative Pay Equity Legislation by Senator Limón." September 27. Available: <https://sd21.senate.ca.gov/news/2022/september/newsom-signs-transformative-pay-equity-legislation-senator-limon>

<sup>20</sup> Senate Judiciary Committee. 2024. "Analysis: California Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act." Available: <https://sjud.senate.ca.gov/system/files/2024-06/ab-2319-wilson-sjud-analysis.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Office of Attorney General Rob Bonta. 2024. "Attorney General Bonta, California Legislative Black Caucus Introduce Legislation to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality Through Implicit Bias Training." February 12. Available: <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-bonta-california-legislative-black-caucus-introduce-legislation>

<sup>22</sup> Dittmar, Kelly. 2023. *Rethinking Women's Political Power*. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.