

# Women chair more than half of prominent state boards and commissions, new study finds

By [Shirley Leung](#) Globe Columnist, Updated October 19, 2022, 12:01 a.m.



Treasurer Deb Goldberg chairs three of the boards and commissions that have reached gender parity: the State Board of Retirement, State Lottery Commission, and Massachusetts School Building Authority. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

The good news first: Women now chair more than half of the 50 most prominent state boards and commissions, up from about a third in 2019, according to the [latest study from the Eos Foundation](#).

The bad news: There is a lot more work to be done elevating people of color to lead those boards. According to Eos, no men of color serve as chair, while the number of women of color overseeing a state of Massachusetts board or commission can be counted on one hand — three Latinas and one Asian American.

To increase momentum on public board diversity, Eos, a nonprofit that tracks the power gap in Massachusetts, recommends the next governor create a new Cabinet role – a “secretary of appointments” with a staff that manages the recruitment of people to serve on the state’s more than 700 boards and commissions. It’s a [position California](#) has had for more than a decade as a way to drive a more [transparent and inclusive appointment process](#).

Currently, Massachusetts has a [boards and commission office](#) that falls under the purview of the governor, who makes the majority of appointments.

“If you want to engage all the talent in the Commonwealth, elevate the director of appointments to a secretary of appointments with deputies and a robust staff who can reach every corner of the state and every demographic group,” said Andrea Silbert, the president of Eos.

Eos has been tracking the diversity of prominent state boards and commissions since 2019, from the Board of Higher Education to the Massachusetts Port Authority. Under Governor Charlie Baker, women have made noticeable gains: they hold 56 percent of board chairs, up from 34 percent in 2019, and account for 43 percent of the seats compared with 39 percent in 2019. During the same period, 44 percent of boards achieved gender parity, up from 32 percent in 2019.

The Cannabis Control Commission, Parole Board, Gaming Commission, and State Board of Retirement are among the boards in which women members outnumber men.



Ava Callender Concepcion, a commissioner with the state's Cannabis Control Commission, one of the boards in which women members outnumber men. HANDOUT

Two boards feature all women: the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

Silbert said it's unusual to see this kind of progress in a relatively short amount of time.

“The governor was very intentional,” Silbert said.

Sarah Finlaw, a spokesperson for Baker, said the administration “is proud of its record to appoint more women and diverse candidates to hundreds of boards and commissions

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over the past several years.”

The administration’s own numbers indicate that since coming into office in January 2015, slightly more than half of the governor’s 3,542 appointees have been women, and nearly a quarter are from diverse backgrounds, including people of color, LGBT individuals, and people with disabilities.

Eos also found that having a female chair increased the likelihood the board would achieve gender parity. Of the 22 boards that have as many women as men, women chaired 16 of them.

Case in point: State Treasurer Deb Goldberg, who chairs three of the boards and commissions that have reached gender parity: the State Board of Retirement, State Lottery Commission, and Massachusetts School Building Authority. Like the governor, Goldberg also makes appointments, including to boards she does not chair such as the beverages control commission.

It should be no surprise that Goldberg champions board diversity. As treasurer, she [launched an initiative](#) to help companies add more women and people of color to their boards. And as chair of the state’s pension fund board, Goldberg has raised the stakes on using its proxy voting power — as a shareholder in more than 11,000 companies — to shape corporate boards. If less than 35 percent of a company’s board is diverse in terms of gender and race, the \$92.4 billion pension fund votes against all board nominees.



The halls of the Massachusetts State House on August 1, 2022. CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

In an interview, Goldberg said her office has streamlined the application process for boards to encourage a wider pool of applicants. At times, when the candidate pool isn't diverse enough, Goldberg's office will keep recruiting instead of just filling the position.

“This is something you really have to focus on,” she said. “We have made sure the appointment process recognizes the intersectionality of race and gender.”

If not for Eos's reports on boards and commissions, we wouldn't know if the state is making progress or moving backward because it does not disclose the diversity of boards and commissions. That's another recommendation from Eos: [Take a page from Nasdaq](#), which now requires an annual disclosure about board diversity from the companies listed on the stock exchange.

Corporate America has embraced diversity because it's good for the bottom line. A [growing body of research](#) indicates that companies with diverse leadership are more likely to outperform and are more profitable.

Eos is far from alone in pushing for board transparency and accountability. The nonprofit has amassed a diverse coalition of supporters for its work: Amplify Latinx, Asian Business Empowerment Council, Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Lawyers for Civil Rights Boston, Get Konnected, New Commonwealth Fund, and YW Boston, among others.

This is an opportunity for the new governor to build on progress made by Baker. Setting diversity goals for public boards and commissions would go a long way to ensuring the Commonwealth stays on the right track, as well as designing a more open and inclusive process.

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Shirley Leung is a Business columnist. She can be reached at [shirley.leung@globe.com](mailto:shirley.leung@globe.com).

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rangerdoc13

10/19/22 - 12:56AM

Promote the best. This is not a color game.



Believe Me Not

10/19/22 - 1:09AM

Why were white people not saying that when ONLY white people were



why were white people not saying that when ONLY white people were being hired and promoted? All of those years people of color were not included in the best?



**Omerta2**

10/19/22 - 1:44AM

Believe Me Not: so your position is based on revenge, not what's right? Placing one hand in ice water and the other in hot water does not achieve a balance.

And yes, Whites were advocating for blacks and men for women, or the changes would not have taken place.

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**Garf Uncle**

10/19/22 - 5:48AM

Such a Globish article. Shirley is so woke

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