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Introduction

Equal Voice is proud to present the Blueprint for Gender Sensitive Legislatures report.

This report provides background on the Systemic Change initiative undertaken by Equal Voice and includes research findings, lessons learned, and policy recommendations for legislatures in Canada.

While each jurisdiction is unique in its governance, parliamentary rules, and culture, the goal of the Systemic Change initiative is to identify and address some of the key systemic barriers within Canadian legislative assemblies that contribute to the under-representation of women. Funded by the Department for Women and Gender Equality, this project strives to achieve gender-sensitive parliaments and a culture conducive to retaining more women in politics.

Equal Voice is a national, bilingual, multi-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women to all levels of political office in Canada. Equal Voice is the only not-for-profit in North America that works with and engages directly with all political parties to elect more women to all levels of government. Equal Voice works within existing systems to determine how all players are affected - while also considering the partisan positions, and finding common ground between them.

Equal Voice acknowledges the existence of individual, organizational, and structural obstacles that contribute to gender inequality, and that women belonging to marginalized groups are impacted at an even greater scale. Women belonging to these groups also face more, and in some cases different, barriers in politics.

Although Equal Voice focuses on women’s representation, efforts to improve women’s pathways to politics will also improve men’s, including men who are currently under-represented in politics. Men too have families, and face harassment. Better, gender-sensitive legislatures benefit all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify systemic barriers in politics for women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with key players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain retention for women politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase representation of women in politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide recommendations to legislatures to break down identified barriers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Challenge

Despite some women gaining the right to vote and to participate in politics over a century ago, women are still under-represented in legislatures, both within Canada and on a global scale. While there is significant variation across jurisdictions and levels of government within Canada, as of October 2019, Canada ranks 54th in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) of Women in Politics.[1]

Women's Representation in Canadian Legislatures in 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province or Territory</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunavut</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fewer women than men are elected in Canada, but women are also more likely to leave politics. For example, a greater proportion of women than men in the 41st Parliament were no longer in politics following the 2015 election (64% of women, compared to 57% of men). Moreover, the men who left politics by choice had spent, on average, 3 more years in politics than the women who retired or left for personal or health reasons. Of all MPs who sought re-election and lost, the women had been in politics, on average, nearly a year and half less than the men.

**House of Common Firsts**
- **Agnes Macphail**: 1st woman elected to the House of Commons in 1921
- **Ethel Blondin-Andrew**: 1st First Nations woman elected to the House of Commons in 1988
- **Jean Augustine**: 1st black woman elected to the House of Commons in 1993
- **Libby Davies**: 1st woman openly identifying as LGBTQ elected to the House of Commons in 1997
- **Yasmin Ratansi, Nina Grewal, and Ruby Dhalla**: simultaneously became the first South Asian women to be elected to the House of Commons in 2004

**Internationally**
- 6.6% of the world’s Heads of State are women
- 19.7% Parliamentary Speakers are women
- 50% of the global population are women, yet only account for 24.3% of elected officials in national parliaments
- Only 3 countries have 50% women’s representation or more in their Parliament
- There are 27 countries where women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians

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Why do we need more women politicians?

For legislatures to be representative of the Canadian population, it’s important to bring women’s voices, experiences, and concerns to the table. The National Democratic Institute’s 35 years of work in over 100 countries around the world found that women are more likely to work across party lines, be highly responsive to constituents concerns, and prioritize health, education, and other key development issues. [7]

While the data is limited, other key findings from studies around the world include:

- Women in leadership positions tend to “resolve national crisis without resorting to violence, advocate for social issues that benefit all, and allocate budgets to health and education.” [8]
- “Gender balance in the political sphere promotes gender balance in the workforce, which could double global GDP growth by 2025.” [9]
- Research shows that women’s equal presence in decision-making bodies, like legislatures, legitimizes public policy decisions and confers institutional trust. [10]
- One study suggested more women in power leads to a healthier population. [11]
- Women are better at bringing funding back to their home districts. In the United States, a woman legislator, on average, passed twice as many bills as a male legislator in one recent session of Congress, and districts represented by women received an additional $49 million annually on average compared to their male-represented counterparts. [12]

However, for Parliaments to benefit from the impacts of having more women elected, multiple studies agree that women have to constitute at least 30% of the decision making body. [13][14][15]

How Equal Voice Assessed the Need for Change

To gain better understanding of the obstacles women face in electoral politics in Canada and the solutions to overcome them, Equal Voice conducted the following research:

- A country wide assessment of barriers and best practices;
- A literature review of existing research on the topic;
- Engagement and consultations with organizations, elected officials, former politicians and local Equal Voice Chapters;
- Surveys of elected officials, former elected officials, and the Canadian public; and
- Case studies and literature reviews of best practices nationally and internationally.
Key Findings

1. Harassment

At the forefront of the initiative was a real conversation addressing harassment. Harassment was repeated frequently throughout the research as a barrier to women's participation and retention in politics. Gender-based oppression is a deterrent to run for politics, and can lead to women being hesitant to fully participate in the political process.

Social media and online harassment is a significant barrier specifically for women, and an even greater deterrent for those belonging to marginalized groups. The public display of online bullying and harassment deters women from considering running, while online harassment can influence women to discontinue participation in politics. Social media harassment also forces women to self-censor and withdraw, leaving them at a disadvantage.\[14\]

The IPU survey on violence against women in politics stated that over 80% of respondents experienced some form of psychological violence during their term, while 20% indicated they experienced physical violence. \[17\]

“I have witnessed and experienced sexism and gender-based discrimination. I have experienced it from within my own caucus, and from members of other caucuses. It has been shocking to have come from another profession where this type of behaviour would be absolutely not allowed. I have reflected on the setting I’m in and I am shocked at how much sexism I see and experience in the building,”

Anonymous MP response to Equal Voice survey

- In 2017, the Canadian Press conducted a poll of female MPs. 58% stated they had been a target of sexual harassment or assault at least once while in office; \[19\]
- *Maclean’s* magazine spoke with MPs regarding sexual harassment and they “widely agree the culture is worse for junior staff, and the anecdotes from staffers point to a disturbing trend of sexualized behaviour at work.”\[19\]
2. Sexism and Gender Stereotypes

The federal Standing Committee on the Status of Women heard from witnesses that “one in five Canadians holds explicit sexist views, and that men and older people are more likely than women to hold these views. Individuals who held explicit sexist views, rated competencies, perceived intelligence, perceived likeability and perceived warmth significantly lower when the example candidate’s credentials were associated with a female name.”

Media coverage plays into these stereotypes, including a focus on the appearance of women political figures, referring to women by their first name, and specific questions on how they will balance family expectations and politics.

A survey study by Name it Change it: Women’s Media Centre observed damaging effects on the favourability of women candidates when their appearance was mentioned (neutral, positive or negative coverage of appearance), while male opponents were not affected by similar coverage at all.

“Studies indicate that voters tend to prefer masculine to feminine traits when evaluating candidates for high political office... (This) gendered division of labour produces broad, blunt ideas and expectations about behaviours that are appropriate, or attributed to the general social categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’... this means that women who are active in specific political, occupational, and civic activities are evaluated differently than are men in comparable pursuits.”

Melanee Thomas
Associate Professor in Political Science, University of Calgary

Media’s coverage of women politicians and their work life balance is a common thread in stories leading up to an election. “Female politicians are often asked about their work-life balance, strengthening the stereotype that women are the primary caregivers, whereas male politicians are rarely asked similar questions... The sexism manifests in several ways including being discredited and ignored, being assessed on different standards in terms of how they look, and expectations that women conform to traditional stereotypes of how women should look or behave.”

Women respondents to the Equal Voice Survey also said sexist media coverage, sexism within the legislatures, and belittling were the second most frequent types of abuse experienced by a larger proportion of women compared to men.

“As a woman, men don’t listen to attribute ideas or comments to me, even when I am chair. As chair, man has tried to take over my role.”
Anonymous MP response to Equal Voice Survey

[22] Name it. Change it. Lake Research Partners
3. Language and Legislative Decorum

Women politicians may experience politics differently than men, particularly as their experience relates to legislative decorum, parliamentary rules, and procedures. Procedures within legislatures can allow women to be directly or indirectly attacked with language, or inadvertently give men member power and/or time to speak. Making a direct reference to gender can encourage stereotypes and demeán women legislators.[29]

The Samara Centre for Democracy surveyed MPs directly on heckling and found that “67% of women MPs reported gendered heckling versus just 20% of their male counterparts. Female respondents to the survey indicated that gender-based heckling affected their performance and reduced their willingness to participate in debates.”[28]

“I have had to formally request that a committee member stop referring to me as ‘little lady’ during formal proceedings; have had minister lose his temper in response to questions during QP, wag his finger at me and admonish me for my inappropriate tone and impertinence; have been called bossy, loud, abrasive, a know it all, and too big for my boots;”  
- Anonymous MP response to Equal Voice survey

When asked about sexism in the workplace, an anonymous federal MP responding to Equal Voice survey, stated “Just listen to QP and hear the thundering (and offensive) heckling directed at female ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries. Listen to the tone of the questions and the assertions of submission they make about women MPs all the time. It’s appalling how misogynistic they are,” said one legislator on opposing party members.

Some politicians stated that one of the biggest impediments to performing well in their role was the political culture accepted within the legislature. “A total lack of enforcement of rules of decorum in the house allowing for abuse, heckling and more,” said an elected official from Manitoba. While another said, “archaic legislative procedures” affected his performance.

Preventative actions including gender-awareness training seminars, as suggested by IPU’s Gender Action Plan[27] and UK Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018[28] mentioned performing unconscious bias training as suggested solutions. A better understanding of what is and what is not acceptable language, as well as a guideline for gender-sensitive language should also be mandatory.[29],[30] Punitive measure by the speaker could hold members responsible for insensitive language, and sexist remarks.

[31] “No One Is Listening.” The Samara Centre for Democracy, 2017,
4. Leadership Positions

The IPU for gender-sensitive parliaments includes action to increase the representation of women to “match the women’s broader representation in society.”[32] Within the action plan to increase women's representation they state that parliaments should “introduce dual leadership for parliamentary structures, where possible through the appointment of a man and a woman and rotate positions of parliamentary leadership between men and women over a period of time.”[33] For example in Canada, the Speaker has significant power in the legislature and there has only been one woman speaker in the House of Commons, and very few in the history of provincial legislatures.

Between 2016 and 2019, only six of the 30 House of Commons Committees (including three joint committees) were chaired by women – Status of Women, the Special Committee on Pay Equity, Heritage, Transportation, Liaison, and Environment. In 14 of the 30 committees, the chair and both vice-chairs were men.[36]

In almost all provinces, women are significantly under-represented on committees that deal with Standing Orders or Rules of the House – the committees that govern the assemblies’ practices.

3. Calendar, Schedule, Sitting Hours, Infrastructure

Politicians interviewed as part of Equal Voice’s study spoke about the importance of predictable calendars, condensed schedules, and family infrastructure within legislatures. The IPU recommendations for gender sensitive parliaments states that parliaments should “rearrange their sitting hours (e.g. by establishing compressed sitting weeks, creating schedules that start early, avoiding late voting, and aligning sitting times with the school calendar) so that parliamentarians can return to their electorates and spend more time with their families.”

Because women still often take the lead role of caregiver, the lack of predictability and advance knowledge of location and business, make it difficult to secure childcare. Without a facility on site to care for a member’s children after hours or where those facilities have minimum age limits for children, it’s difficult to balance family and work for a lot of members.

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[36] List of Committees.” Our Commons.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Only 12 women have held the position of Premier in Canada, and only one secured a second mandate.

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UK’s Gender-Sensitive Audit

Legislators govern themselves and can overcome gender disparities. For example, in 2010 the Standing Orders in the UK Parliamentary provided for a woman to be included across the four elected positions of Speaker and Deputies.[34]

The UK also recommended that the panel of chairs on committees need to be made more diverse over time and include members of diverse populations. A committee or department dedicated to the monitoring of women members overall and women in leadership positions can ensure a gender-sensitive legislature and create accountability.[35]
The IPU suggests family rooms and spaces within buildings to offer more time for families, nursing, and childcare. The House of Commons and the Alberta Legislature, for instance, offer a family room for time and space to express milk. Infants on the floor for care and nursing, as well as parental leave provisions, would open the doors to more participants in politics. Those starting a family may consider legislatures more accessible and this would allow for more diversity within the chambers.

Australia has allowed nursing mothers to vote by proxy since 2008, limited only in the case of third readings on bills that propose a change to the Constitution.

In New Zealand, the Speaker can grant leave on a compassionate basis or because of family reasons, including absence for a short period following the birth of their children and proxy voting is used.

In 2018, the UK House of Commons passed the following resolution: “That this House believes that it would be to the benefit of the functioning of parliamentary democracy that honourable Members who have had a baby or adopted a child should for a period of time be entitled, but not required, to discharge their responsibilities to vote in this House by proxy.”

In Newfoundland and Labrador, a recommendation on innovative use of technology was made: “The chair and committee members are expected to take advantage of electronic media to participate in committee work where practical.” Currently, however, a Member cannot count toward quorum unless they are physically present.

B.C. and Alberta allow Members to participate in Committee meetings using technology.

The IPU suggests family rooms and spaces within buildings to offer more time for families, nursing, and childcare. The House of Commons and the Alberta Legislature, for instance, offer a family room for time and space to express milk.

Allowing infants on the floor for care and nursing, as well as parental leave provisions, would open the doors to more participants in politics. Those starting a family may consider legislatures more accessible and this would allow for more diversity within the chambers.

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[42] Legislative Assembly Act.” Alberta, Queen’s Printer, Section 1 (6).
Equal Voice’s Recommendations

Based on the research conducted for this project, Equal Voice has identified ten main recommendations for modernizing legislatures. These recommendations fall under three over-arching pillars.

Pillar One: Safe and Respectful Workplace

The political system was created by men for men. When Canada’s institutions were formed, only a small proportion of the Canadian population could participate in the creation of political systems, practices, and procedures. Consequently, Parliaments and legislatures as places of work largely reflect the interests of those who created them. Women entering these spaces face a number of barriers embedded within policies and practices that have gone unchanged. It is important to acknowledge that legislative assemblies are atypical workplaces complicated by power and political dynamics.

It is critical that legislative assemblies create a working environment that is responsive to the needs of those that work there. The world is changing, and so are politics. Ensuring legislatures are a safe and respectful place to work benefits all current and future legislators.

Harassment & Sexual Harassment Policy

Harassment and sexual harassment are issues intensified by the imbalance of power and political dynamics.

**Recommendations**

- Institutionalizing comprehensive harassment policies that apply to all legislators, staff, constituency assistants, interns, and volunteers, that are inclusive of all work sites and are administered by an independent third party.

- Implementing mandatory in-person training and provide refresher workshops on the policies and procedures.

- Assuring the policies have timelines which include post-resolution counseling and resources for the actors involved.
Security Policy

A security policy can improve the workplace safety for legislators and their staff. Elected women face heightened levels of harassment, both in-person and online.

Recommendations

- Conducting a gender-sensitive security assessment.
- Providing security guidelines and checklists for constituency offices.
- Addressing online threats and social media harassment.

Legislative Decorum

Heckling is a major issue in all Canadian legislatures. In addition to providing a healthy workplace, it is important that the public feels confident in the legislators' work.

Recommendations

- Committing to ending gender-based heckling and personal attacks in the Chamber.

Pillar Two: Family Friendly Measures

Women in politics face prejudices regarding their social role as primary caretakers, especially those who have young children or are hoping to start a family while in office. Care-related duties and the social expectations of these responsibilities remain a barrier for women's political participation.

Acknowledging and challenging these norms by offering both men and women more work-life balance is an important step towards creating gender-sensitive policy solutions. Any care-related provisions or accommodations must be equally available to all legislators. Family friendly policies will also enable political participation for younger people who are interested in starting a family.
Pregnancy & Parental Leave Policy

Many Canadian jurisdictions do not have explicit policies that allow for pregnancy and/or parental leave for politicians.

Recommendations

- Amending parliamentary rules to allow all new parents to take leave without penalty for the adoption, fostering, guardianship, and/or arrival of a new child.
- Formalizing a pregnancy leave for birthing parents.
- Allowing legislators to return to their leadership positions, such as minister, parliamentary secretary, shadow critic, committee chair, etc., upon returning from leave, where possible.

Childcare Arrangements and Infrastructures

Physical infrastructure for child-minding on legislative grounds is important for elected officials with children. Additionally, rule and policy changes to allow for greater participation of legislators who are parents would increase their capacity for work.

Recommendations

- Amending rules to allow infants on the floor of the legislative chambers.
- Equipping legislative assemblies with childcare facilities, high chairs, change tables, family rooms, etc.
- Allowing flexibility within budget line items to cover family care related costs.
Family Travel Arrangements

Due to the nature of Canada's electoral system, legislators have to travel back and forth to their constituencies. This can create a financial burden if they have young families.

**Recommendations**

- Ensuring caregivers, spouses, and/or dependents are included in travel coverage and budgets.
- Allowing infants to travel without impacting legislators' travel points or budget

Parliamentary Calendar and Sitting Hours

Unpredictable and unconventional job hours make it difficult to have work-life balance for legislators with families.

**Recommendations**

- Providing a finalized parliamentary calendar and send to all legislators with as much notice as possible to make necessary family related arrangements.
- Adjusting sitting hours to match conventional office hours.
- Implementing compacted sitting weeks to accommodate the travel needs of legislators, especially those residing in constituencies further away from their legislature.
Pillar Three: Modernization

Modernized legislatures can create flexibility in the government’s processes and allow participation via non-conventional methods.

Proxy Voting Policy and Remote Participation Policy

In conjunction with maternity and parental leave policies, proxy voting and remote participation can allow greater flexibility for legislators to carry out their duties, while maintaining a work-life balance. As is common for witnesses appearing in committees via teleconference, remote participation can allow legislators to participate in debates and discussions without being physically present.

Recommendations

- Allowing pre-arranged proxies to cast votes for absent legislators who are not able to vote in person.
- Proxy votes to be recorded on official records space.
- Permitting remote participation for chamber discussions and committee meetings.

Fixed Election Date

In elected officials jurisdictions without fixed election dates (current and potential) face challenges in lacking adequate time to prepare and plan family related arrangements.

Recommendations

- Implementing pre-determined election dates, where possible.
Staff Support and Compensation

Constituencies or ridings vary in size and composition, which need to be accounted for in staff support and compensation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Formalizing set adjustments to legislator’s compensation to match inflation rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Granting sufficient budgets for staff support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authorizing budget line flexibility to account for differences in constituencies needs (such as rent and travel variations) and other associated costs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact:
Equal Voice Making Change

As Equal Voice is the only national organization working directly towards gender parity at all levels of government across Canada, we are uniquely positioned to effect change within legislatures. As a multi-partisan organization, Equal Voice took into account the varying positions and perspectives of political parties across Canada.

Rather than creating division through party-specific policy, Equal Voice was able to unite elected officials from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints around concrete policy change opportunities.

Equal Voice also has Chapters across the country, with members on the ground that understand the region, and possess the required political insight on the realities of their given region or province. This cultural understanding was vital to open and honest conversation, and creating strong relationships. Partnerships were also developed on the ground with local community groups working towards similar goals.

These relationships determined where Equal Voice could offer expertise, gain access to legislatures, and examine where change was necessary. They also allowed us to identify where change was probable in a given area based on the existing political climate.

Equal Voice also responded to requests from elected officials and legislatures when a need for change was identified following a specific incident, or where support and expertise was needed.

Most legislatures now have modernized harassment policies, and Equal Voice’s advocacy was instrumental in attaining this shift across Canada.
Summary of consultations and recommendations:

- Equal Voice provided policy analysis to 6 legislatures;
- 192 policy recommendations have been shared;
- 16 meetings took place to discuss opportunities for change;
- 6 media publications covered this initiative;
- 300 political actors were contacted regarding the Systemic Change initiative;
- Long term relationships were built with local organizations working with legislatures towards parity;
- All major political parties were contacted across the country to discuss and share information on Systemic Change;
- A survey was sent to all current federal and provincial elected officials, as well as some former officials, to get their personal experience with specific barriers in politics.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Equal Voice met with the Speaker of the House, the Chair of the Privileges and Elections Committee, the Management Commission, the Law Clerk, the Commissioner of Legislative Standards, and other members of the House, representing all parties, to discuss recommendations. Equal Voice met with the Privileges and Elections Committee and presented all recommendations for a Safe Anti-Harassment Policy. The Policy recommendations were tabled due to the election in 2019, but the new Privileges and Elections Committee contacted Equal Voice to state that the legislation was on the order papers for December 2019.

Yukon

A Member of the Legislative Assembly reached out to Equal Voice for expertise and input on the drafted harassment policy. Equal Voice drafted ten recommended questions to consider when making a harassment policy for elected officials. Equal Voice worked with the MLA and the Members Services Board committee to develop the draft. The final version of the harassment policy was presented to the Speaker and adopted by the assembly.
**New Brunswick**

Equal Voice worked with the Women’s Council to help put forward recommendations for a harassment policy. Recommendations were sent to all party leaders and the legislative clerk, who then passed the recommendations to the sub-committee responsible for the development of a safe and respectful workplace policy.

The Premier’s clerk contacted Equal Voice in hopes of implementing a policy that allowed infants on the floor. At the time, infants were signed in as strangers and the government saw this as an opportunity to put forward some family friendly measures. However, the election has paused this discussion.

**Saskatchewan**

Equal Voice met with members from the governing and opposition parties to discuss amendments and policies around family-friendly measures in the early Spring of 2019. On April 1, the government announced the adoption of numerous measures, including parental leave and child-friendly infrastructure on Legislative grounds.

**Northwest Territories**

Equal Voice submitted two briefs to the Legislative Assembly in the NWT. The first provided recommendations on parental leave, while the second was more broadly on women’s representation in politics. The resulting report by the “Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly” (released June 4, 2019) cites Equal Voice. Of note, the territorial election held in October 2019 yielded a record number of elected women, including the new Premier, Caroline Cochrane.

**Prince Edward Island**

Equal Voice worked with PEI’s Coalition for Women in Government to determine areas in need of improvement and sent the top ten recommendations to all party leaders before the election in 2019. There had been discussion between the Coalition and legislative staff regarding possible changes in the sitting hours and predictability of the parliamentary calendar. In October 2019, the Legislative Assembly put forward a call for public opinion regarding calendars and sitting schedule. Working directly with the coalition, Equal Voice sent a letter and recommendations to for a predictable calendar and compressed sitting hours to the Standing Committee on Rules and Regulations. Those recommendations were reflected in the committee’s interim report. Deliberations will continue in the spring of 2020.
Nova Scotia

In August 2018, a NS MLA reached out to Equal Voice after taking our survey for elected officials. There was an opportunity to bring forward a predictable calendar and consider changes in the sitting hours for the NS legislature. Equal Voice had conversations with MLAs across party lines who all stated a need for a more predictable calendar – we were aware that it was a welcome change. Equal Voice documented and researched best practices for a calendar, and determined solutions to barriers in developing a change in standing orders.

All research and recommendations for a predictable calendar policy was sent to the MLA and their caucus. The caucus reached out to Equal Voice and scheduled an all-caucus meeting to continue the conversation regarding the calendar and other systemic change initiatives in November 2019. Equal Voice met with member of the three-parties, as well as their staff members to discuss the possibility of a predictable calendar, which was well-received. An assessment of best practices and recommendations were put forward to all members at the discussion.

Federal

In April 2019, The Standing Committee on the Status of Women published a report: Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics.” Equal Voice’s Executive Director and a board member were asked to speak on the committee of experts for this report.

All of Systemic Change’s Top Ten Recommendations were put forward within the report, including parental leave for elected officials. Later that year, parental leave was implemented for federal officials.

In 2017, Equal Voice’s Executive Director presented recommendations to a committee on Bill C-65 regarding anti-harassment policy.

In 2019 Equal Voice’s Executive Director testified about the significant impacts of online hate faced by women politicians to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.
Next Steps

It will take approximately 83 years to achieve gender parity given the current electoral trends. For example, in April 2019, every Canadian Premier met in Saskatoon, but there was not a single woman at the table, and only 29% of Members of Parliament elected in the 43rd General Election were women. While more women candidates are running in each election, progress in Canada has been slow and incremental, and it has not been linear.

However, there is opportunity to create change that allows more women to participate in politics and remain in politics. Change does take time, but Equal Voice is recognized as a reputable resource for women's representation in Canada, and has created relationships within legislatures across the country.

The success of the original Systemic Change initiative was largely due to partnerships and timing. An incident or an immediate need would often act as the catalyst for a politician to step forward with a proposal for change. Elected officials often sought out Equal Voice's support to draft policies, convene stakeholders, and provide briefings on how to help move change forward.

The lack of resources available for legislators, the lack of communication between regions, and the multi-partisan nature of politics, make Equal Voice perfectly positioned to provide this kind of third party support.

Throughout the Systemic Change Initiative, Equal Voice initiated important action to dismantle barriers women face within legislatures, but there is still a lot more to be done.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can support this essential work, please contact us at info@equalvoice.ca

To learn more about this and other initiatives, sign up to receive our updates at www.equalvoice.ca/mailing_list

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