

The Vermont Commission on Women proudly presents this first edition of our report on the social and economic status of Vermont women and girls. The report will be submitted to the Governor, Speaker of the House, and Senate President Pro Tempore pursuant to (h)(6) of 3 V.S.A. s/s 22, the authorizing statute for the Vermont Commission on Women. This section reads, *"To report by January 15 of each year to the governor, speaker of the house and senate president pro tempore an annual summary of Vermont women's social and economic status including, but not limited to, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and political participation and representation."*

Our goal in compiling this report is to make it concise, user-friendly, and relevant to your work in the executive and legislative branches of government. We organized information in this report using three key categories of the Commission's 2000-2005 Strategic Plan: Education and Human Development, Economic Equity and Self-Sufficiency, and Leadership and Public Life (please contact the Commission at info@women.state.vt.us if you would like a summary of the Strategic Plan).

This report on the status of Vermont women and girls includes both highlights of where we are currently and trends over time, when that information is available. All information presented is based on the most up-to-date data available at the time of publication from national and state sources and can inform our work on behalf of the state's women.

Education and Human Development

To understand the status of Vermont women, one must first focus on Vermont girls. Girls' achievement in elementary and middle school, as measured by scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (or SAT), often are an important determinant for college admission. Continued efforts must be made to improve boys' achievement in the early grades, while sustaining girls' success in high school.

Additionally, while girls have more ambitious postsecondary education plans, and are less likely to drop out of high school than boys, they predominately choose fields other than math, science and technology. State and private initiatives encouraging girls to enter and advance in these lucrative and still male-dominated fields will benefit Vermont's economy.

Economic Equity and Self-Sufficiency

A significant wage gap between median earnings for women and men exists in Vermont in 2002.

The gap has real impact: due to the dependence on women's earnings, Vermont families lose \$5,000 annually (source: *"Equal Pay for Working Families" 1999, AFL-CIO and the Institute for Women's Policy Research*).

Although Vermont is slightly better overall than the national average, it is alarming that Vermont's wage gap widened in 1997 for the first time since the mid-1960's. Efforts by policy makers and employers to end wage discrimination are critical to the economic well being of Vermont families.

At the bottom of the economic spectrum, the overwhelming predominance of female-headed households living in poverty is due to women working in lower paying jobs, wage inequities, and lack of access to career advancement. Equal pay benefits these families the most.

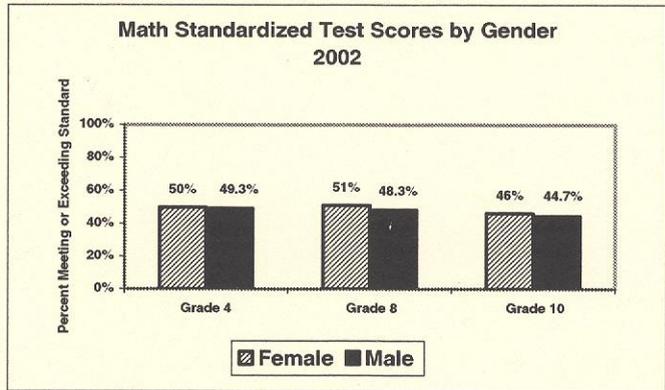
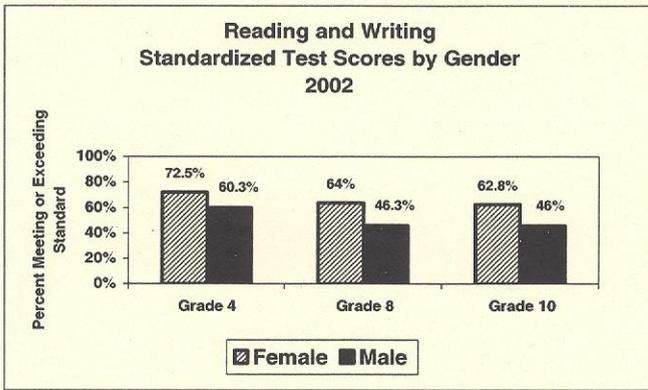
Vermont women continue to participate in the work force at a high rate, and families with two working parents are now the norm. This fact has broad policy implications for Vermont. The state would benefit from policies providing support and increased flexibility for working families including paid family leave, increased access and subsidies for quality early care and education, and school scheduling tied to the needs of today's families rather than yesterday's.

The number of women-owned businesses is decreasing due to continued lack of access to capital for start-up and expansion costs. Efforts to reverse this trend will support a new generation of the small businesses so critical to the state's economy.

Leadership and Public Life

While high school girls appear more civic-minded than high school boys, and more women than men register to vote and vote, this has not translated into gender equity in leadership and public life in Vermont.

Although progress has been made in achieving gender balance on state boards and commissions, the number of women elected to the Vermont legislature has plateaued and fallen since the early 1990's. Efforts to recruit women to serve on public boards as well as to run for elected office will ensure that Vermont can utilize the leadership potential of all of its citizens, male and female alike. We cannot afford to do otherwise.

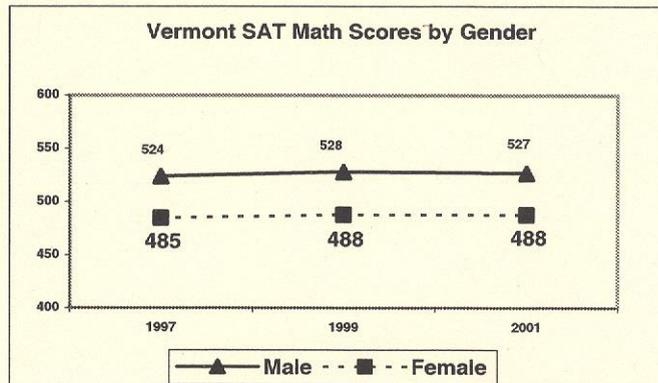
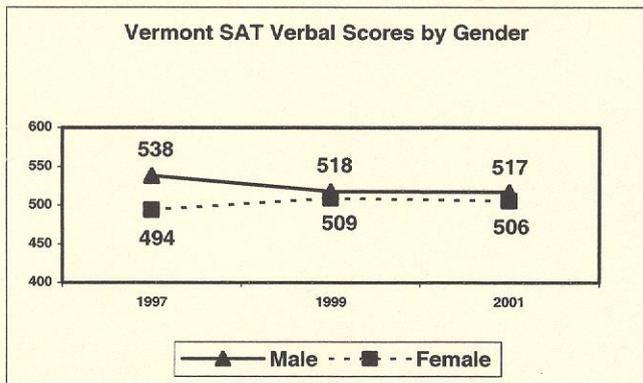


Vermont Standards Fourth, Eighth & Tenth Grades: Gender Differences

At the primary, middle and secondary school level, girls consistently score higher than boys on the Vermont Standards. Scores reveal a gender gap more pronounced in reading and writing than math.

Note: Charts based on the New Standards Reference Exam and evaluated according to the Vermont Standards, a rubric of specific knowledge and skills all students must obtain before graduation from high school.

Source: "School Improvement Support Guide", 2002, Vermont Department of Education

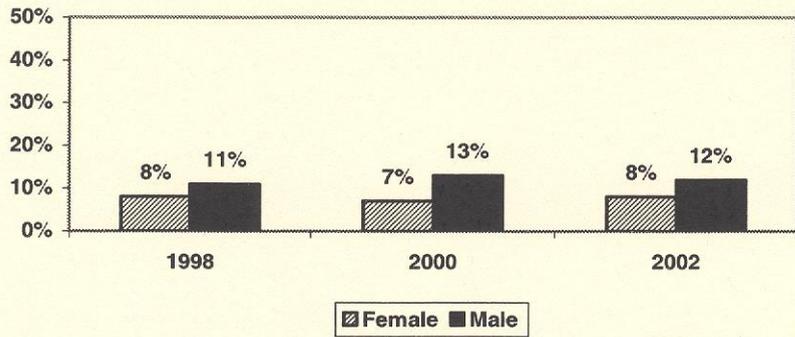


Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): Gender Differences

SAT scores, used for college admission, paint the opposite picture from the Vermont Standards, with boys scoring higher than girls across the board. Again conversely, while the Vermont Standards show a wider gender difference in language scores than in math scores, the SAT shows a wider gender difference in math scores. Achievement by girls in the earlier grades, as measured by the Vermont Standards, reverses by the end of high school for college admission purposes as measured by the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Source: "The Vermont Institute's Equity Initiatives", 2001, Vermont Institute for Science, Math, and Technology

Vermont Dropout Rate by Gender



Boys drop out of high school at a consistently higher rate than girls. Over the last four years, drop out rates in Vermont have hovered around 8% for girls and 12% for boys.

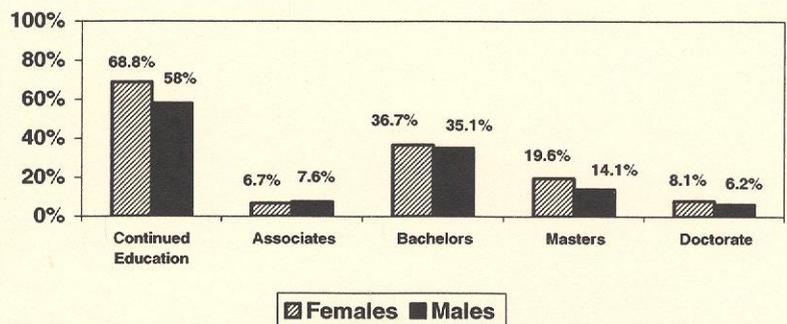
Source: Data collected by the Vermont Department of Education

Overall, more young women than men are interested in seeking higher education. In 2000, approximately ten percent more women indicated interest in pursuing degrees in higher education. Also more women expressed interest in completing graduate degrees.

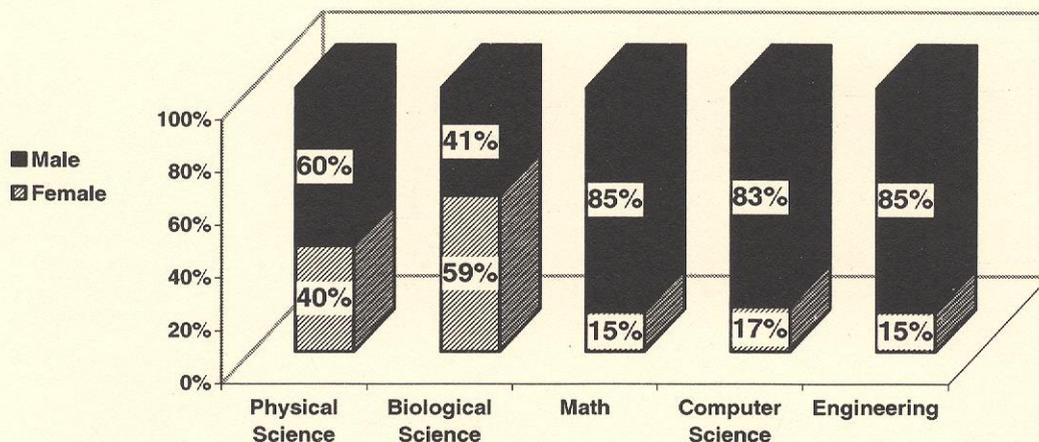
Note: Students were surveyed one year after graduation from high school.

Source: "Vermont Student Assistance Corporation Senior Survey: Actual Activities After High School", 2000, The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Post Secondary Plans by Gender 2000

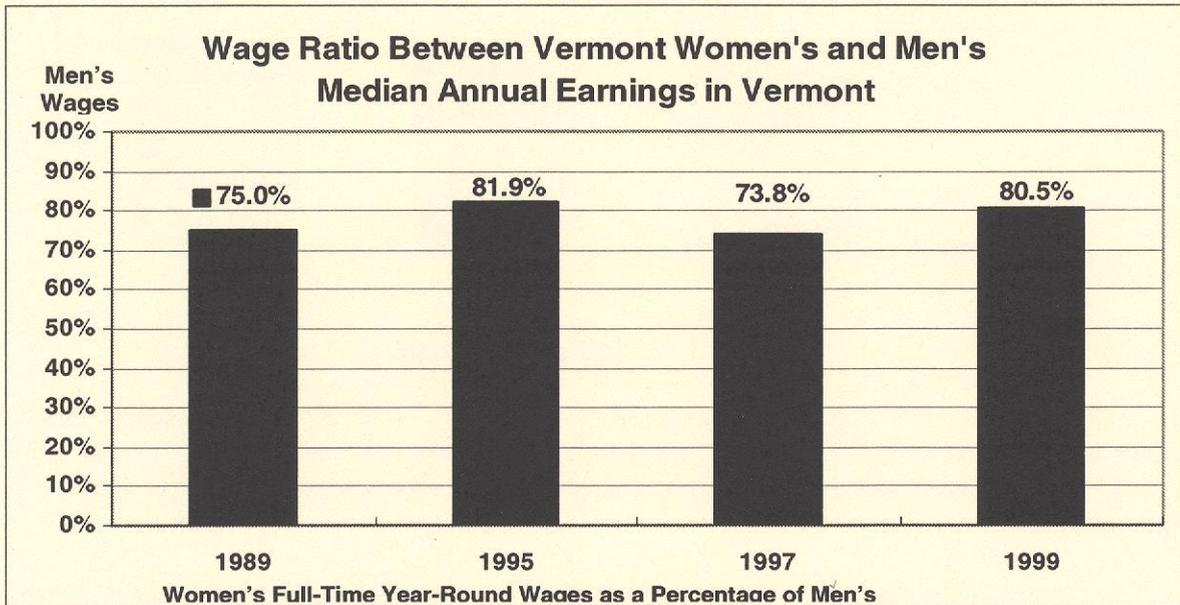


Intended College Majors by Gender



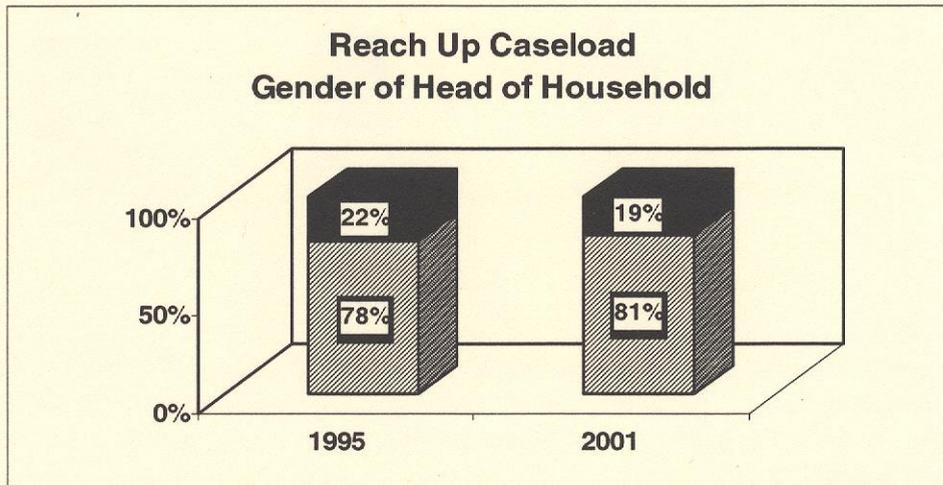
The overwhelming majority of Vermont seniors who intend to pursue college majors in math, science and engineering male. Although young men are more interested in these fields than young women, standard test scores show that they do not necessarily have a greater aptitude in these areas.

Source: "The Vermont Institute's Equity Initiatives", 2001, Vermont Institute for Science, Math, and Technology



While Vermont continues to show a slight improvement over the national average in closing the wage ratio between men and women, the gap widened in the late 1990's in Vermont for the first time.

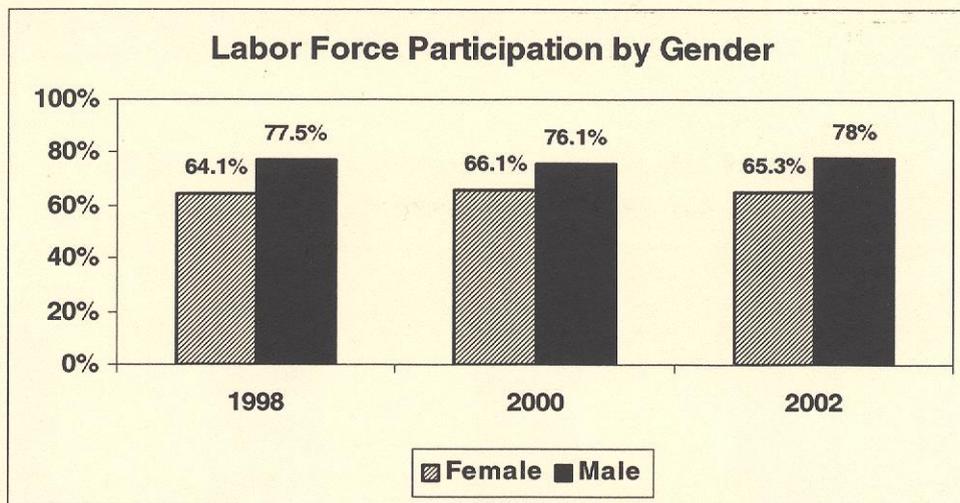
Source: "The Status of Women in the States" 2000, Institute for Women's Policy Research



The majority of households poor enough to qualify for government assistance consist of a single mother and her dependent children. The poverty rate for these households is four times that of the poverty rate for the state's residents in general. This gender-based poverty is partially attributable to the disparity in wages between women and men and the fact that more single-parent families headed by women.

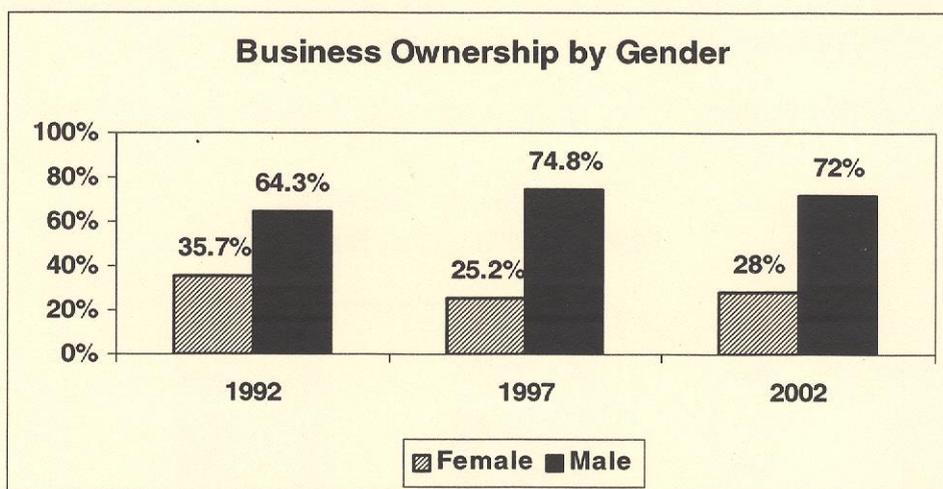
Note: A family of three is eligible for Reach Up government assistance if family income drops below \$12,000.

Source: Research and Statistics Division of the Department of PATH, 2001



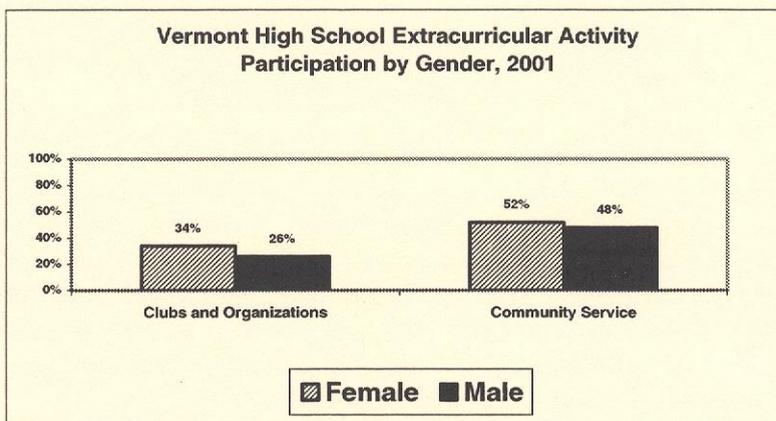
After huge increases in the last few decades, women's participation in the labor force remains relatively steady. Census 2000 revealed that in the majority of Vermont families, 68%, both parents work outside of the home. This has wide ranging policy implications for children's early care and education as well as the need for family-friendly employment policies.

Source: "The Status of Women in the States" 1998, 2000, 2002, Institute for Women's Policy Research



The number of women-owned businesses has declined over the past decade in Vermont. This may be due in part to women's relative lack of access to capital for start-up and expansion costs because their businesses tend to be smaller and younger. In addition, collateral has been a problem in obtaining capital for women-owned firms because many are service businesses.

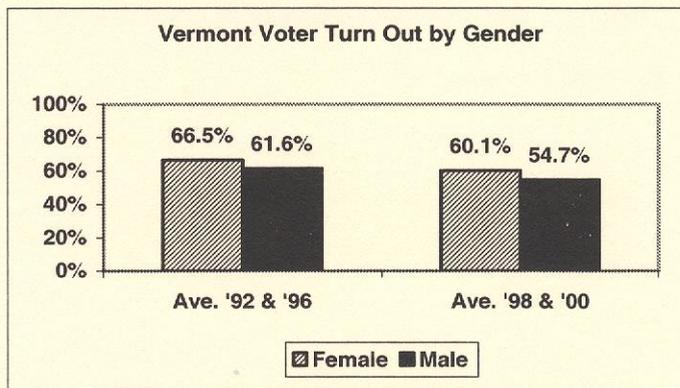
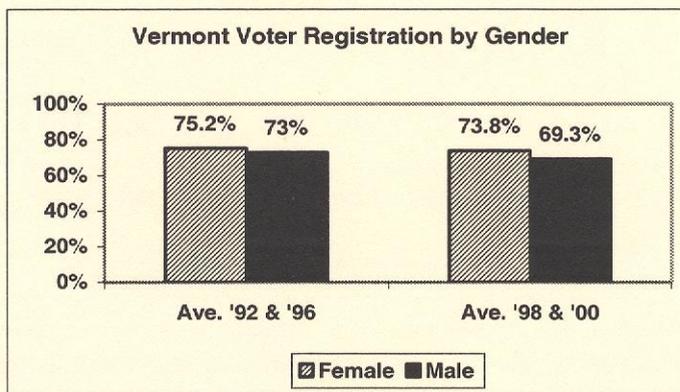
Source: "The Status of Women in the States" 1998, 2000, Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Women-Owned Businesses in Vermont, 2002: A Fact Sheet" 2002, Center for Women's Business Research



In 2001 more high school girls reported participating in clubs and organizations and community service than boys.

Note: Participation defined as one or more hours per week.

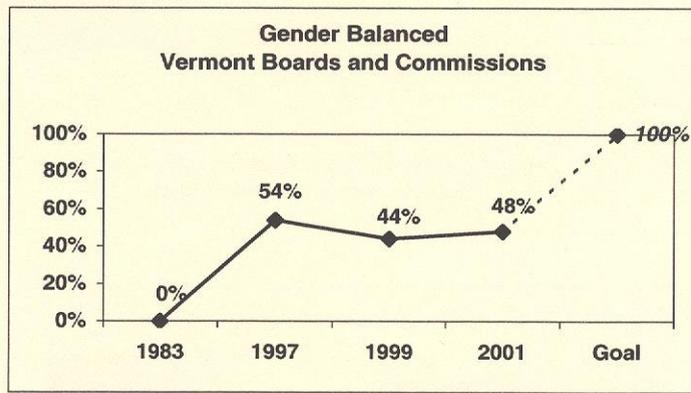
Source: "The 2001 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey" 2001, Vermont Department of Health, Vermont Department of Education



Women have a higher rate of voter registration and participation than men.

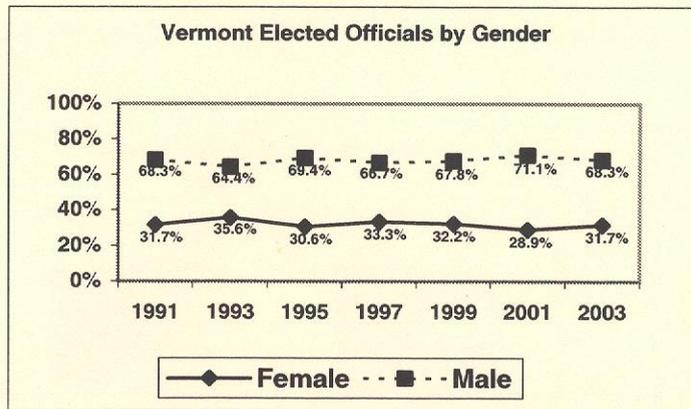
Note: Because 1998 was not a presidential election year it lowers the averages of '98 & '00 in comparison with '92 & '96.

Source: "The Status of Women in the States" 1998, 2000, and 2002, Institute for Women's Policy Research



As one measure of the participation of women in public life, the Commission on Women has analyzed the gender composition of state boards and commissions since 1983. At that time no state board or commission was gender balanced, in fact, the majority had no female members at all. Since then Vermont has made progress, and currently 48% of the state's boards and commissions are gender-balanced.

Source: Vermont Commission on Women (VCW) analysis of Civil Government, State of Vermont, 2001, 1999, 1997, Office of the Secretary of State



Men continue to dominate the Vermont Legislature. The number of women legislators was higher ten years ago than it is currently, and Vermont no longer leads the country towards equity in elected office.

Note: Through 2002 Vermont led the country in the number of women in appointed office.

Source: VCW analysis of the Vermont Legislature