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SC Women in Leadership Celebrates Women Who Have Sought Elective and Appointive Office
Annual Leading Women Dinner Honors Women Who Have Blazed Trails in Civic Leadership

September 22, 2022 (Columbia, South Carolina) – SC Women in Leadership (WIL) will honor outgoing S.C. State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman, S.C. State Senator Mia McLeod, and S.C. State Representative Rita Allison at their annual Leading Women Dinner on September 28, 2022 from 6-9 p.m. at 701 Whaley Street in Columbia. The event will feature a keynote address by The Honorable Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, former mayor of Baltimore, Maryland and 73rd President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Guests at the event will include some 275 current and former female candidates, elected and appointed officials, and supporters of equal representation in civic leadership.

WIL is a statewide multi-partisan organization working to inform, inspire, and involve qualified women in every aspect of elected and appointed leadership. The Leading Women Dinner recognizes and celebrates the South Carolina women who have stepped forward to seek elective (win or lose) and appointive office, honors women who have blazed trails in civic leadership so that others may follow, and builds a support network to encourage women to vie for civic leadership roles.

Due to institutional, socio-economic, and cultural barriers that persist in South Carolina, running for elected office remains daunting for women. Although 51% of South Carolina's population is female, only 17.6% of seats in the state legislature are held by women and women are similarly underrepresented in local elected office and on public appointed boards and commissions. Furthermore, of 170 state legislators, only 10 are Black women. South Carolina voters have never sent a woman to represent them in the U.S. Senate. Additionally, since 1993, there had been no women at all representing South Carolina in the U.S. Congress until Nancy Mace (R-Charleston) was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020. No woman of color from South Carolina has ever served in the U.S. Congress. Despite the challenges women face, this year 266 women filed to run for elected office from city and town councils to Governor with 174 women on the ballot in the general election in November.

Four honorees will be recognized for their vision, determination, and the stamina to stand up and make a difference through their careers in the public sector. Their work and active engagement in mentoring is helping other women that follow to achieve high potential in public service. WIL is proud to recognize these remarkable women who have worked across both gender and party lines to move South Carolina forward.

Leading Woman Honoree, S.C. State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman

As State Superintendent, Spearman is the highest female elected official currently in office in the state. Throughout her career as a public school music teacher, assistant principal, member of the South

Carolina House of Representatives, Deputy Superintendent of the South Carolina Department of Education, Executive Director of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, and South Carolina State Superintendent of Education, she has worked across party lines and embodied the principles of cooperation and collaboration that SC WIL promotes.

Leadership Legacy Honoree, S.C. State Senator Mia McLeod

A trailblazing leader, Mia S. McLeod was the first woman to represent House District 79 and Senate District 22 and the first black woman ever to run for Governor of South Carolina. Senator McLeod is known for her bipartisan work in and through state government.

Leadership Legacy Honoree, S.C. State Representative Rita Allison

Representative Rita Allison has served a total of 28 years in the S.C. House of Representatives and founded the General Assembly's Women's Caucus. She was a member of the Spartanburg District Five School Board of Trustees, ran for Lt. Governor, and served as an education advisor, and later as the Legislative Director to Governor Mark Sanford.

Up & Coming Leader Honoree, Nocola Hemphill

Nocola Hemphill was the first woman and Black candidate to run for Mayor of the Town of Winnsboro. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Southern Women Philanthropy Conference working to strengthen and educate rural communities.

"We intend that all the women we honor at the Leading Women Dinner, along with our keynote speaker, inspire other women to consider leadership roles - in their home communities and at all levels. she continued. "We need the inclusive leadership styles our honorees present to build a more equitable state," said Barbara Rackes, CEO and chair of the SC WIL board of directors.

Previously hosted by the Southeastern Institute for Women in Politics, the event includes a V.I.P. reception for sponsors and special guests from 6-7 p.m. and seated dinner beginning at 7 p.m. with keynote remarks and award presentations for women in local and statewide office that have devoted themselves to community service, demonstrated a commitment to working across party lines, and whose civic work has improved the quality of life for all South Carolinians. Proceeds from the event, including sponsorship support from Secondary Solutions, Luck Companies, and Congressman Jim Clyburn, underwrite WIL's mission of recruiting and training more qualified women to run for elective and appointive office in South Carolina.

Visit the [event web page](#) for expanded bios for the honorees and keynote speaker. To access the media kit for the event, including hi-res portraits of the honorees, please click [here](#).

About SC Women in Leadership

SC Women in Leadership (WIL) is a statewide multi-partisan group of women working together across differences to move South Carolina forward by informing, inspiring, and involving women in leadership. WIL's work sharing information about, making connections to, and encouraging women's engagement in local and state civic leadership is moving South Carolina forward socially, economically, educationally, and environmentally. SC WIL believes that as talented women with diverse and inclusive backgrounds step up to lead and to govern, gender and racial equality, as well as community equity can at last become a reality. SC WIL's vision is for women to be represented at every level of leadership including elected officials, appointed government boards and commissions, and as active volunteers and advocates in the community. Visit scwomenlead.net to see how SC WIL is working to fill the pipeline with women, increase fair voting, and reduce polarization.

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