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SC Women in Leadership Recognizes “Sister Senators” for Leadership Legacy

Annual Leading Women Dinner Honors Women Who Have Blazed Trails in Civic Leadership

August 1, 2023 (Columbia, South Carolina) – SC Women in Leadership (SC WIL) will recognize the only five female South Carolina State Senators, Penry Gustafson, Margie Bright Matthews, Mia McLeod, Sandy Senn, and Katrina Shealy, as their 2023 Leadership Legacy honorees at the annual Leading Women Dinner on September 26, 2023 at 701 Whaley Street in Columbia. SC Ports President and CEO, Barbara Melvin was previously announced as their [2023 Leading Woman](#) honoree. SC WIL is a statewide multi-partisan organization working to inform, inspire, and involve qualified women in 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. The Leading Woman, Leadership Legacy, and Rising Star awards honor women in local, statewide, and appointive offices 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.

S.C. Senators Gustafson (R-Kershaw), Matthews (D-Colleton), McLeod (I-Richland/Fairfield), Senn (R-Charleston/Dorchester), and Shealy (R-Lexington), dubbed the “Sister Senators,” come from different political positions, but have united to demand women’s views be heard and protect their freedom as equal citizens. SC WIL recognizes them for their example that cooperation and respectful conversations, rather than political partisanship, can make our state a better place to live and work for all citizens.

“The Sister Senators are showing us that our legislators can disagree on some issues and still respect each other, said Barbara Rackes, CEO and president of the SC WIL board of directors, “that we can find

common ground and work across party lines to achieve progress for the people of South Carolina.”

“Women are 51% of the population in South Carolina, but our male dominated state legislature is enacting laws that treat women like second-class citizens. Women must turn out to vote in party primaries that most voters skip and cross party lines in primary and general elections to support pro-women candidates,” emplores Sen. Katrina Shealy. “We [Sister Senators] are honored to be recognized for our Leadership Legacy, speaking up for the women of South Carolina demanding that our rights as full citizens are protected.”

Due to institutional, socio-economic, and cultural barriers that persist in South Carolina, running for elected office is daunting for female candidates. Only 14.7% 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. 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.

To address this inequality, SC WIL has undertaken [More in 2024](#), an ambitious year-long push to recruit women from across the state to run for elected office in the 2024 election cycle and apply to serve on public boards and commissions. SC WIL’s More in 2024 recruitment effort calls for citizens across the state to ask women they know to consider seeking elected and appointed office and [refer](#) them to SC WIL for training, resources, and information to help them overcome barriers to leadership. SC WIL’s goal is to triple the number of women filing to run and seeking appointment at all levels of government. The recruitment effort aims to infuse more than 800 more women into the pipeline to public leadership in South Carolina. This follows a decline in the total number of women in the S.C. Legislature after the 2022 election, reversing a decade-long trend of increases.

The Leading Women Dinner, previously hosted by the Southeastern Institute for Women in Politics, includes a reception presented by South Carolina Ports, open beer and wine bar, seated dinner, and awards. [Corporate sponsorships, tables, and individual tickets](#) are available. Proceeds from the event support SC WIL’s mission of recruiting and training women to run for elective and appointive office in South Carolina.

[View](#) full bios of the Sister Senators.

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About SC Women in Leadership

SC Women in Leadership (SC 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.

SC 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 learn more about how SC WIL is working to fill the pipeline with women, increase fair voting, and reduce polarization.

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