

Supreme Court: Sets precedent for increase in women judges

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Madison, Wisconsin (July 30, 2021) – The Wisconsin Supreme Court has set one precedent that’s been tough for lower courts to follow, but they’re catching on.

Wisconsin has the highest percentage of women justices of any state supreme court in the nation at nearly 86 percent, or six of seven justices.

By comparison, as of Aug. 1, when the state’s newly elected judges take office, women will make up nearly half of the judges on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals and about a third of judges on the state trial court bench. However, the number of women on each lower court is at a record level and rising.

Last year, the female majority on the [Supreme Court](#) grew from five of seven justices to six of seven justices when Justice Jill J. Karofsky took office. On Aug. 1, the number of women on the [Wisconsin Court of Appeals](#) will increase from six of 16 judges to seven of 16 judges, when Judge Shelley A. Grogan takes office. Also as of Aug. 1, 11 women judges will have been added to the state’s trial court bench, including five judges who were elected and six who were appointed since the beginning of 2021.

“This is a steady and meaningful trend for the Wisconsin Judiciary. It’s great to see more women taking on the challenge of being a judge and holding public office. The legal profession and the court system benefit greatly from this public service,” said Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Annette Kingsland Ziegler.

Wisconsin Supreme Court

Ziegler’s election to the Supreme Court in 2007 created the state Supreme Court’s first female majority. At the time, she joined the late Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson

and current justices Patience Drake Roggensack and Justice Ann Walsh Bradley. Since then, justices Rebecca Grassl Bradley (2015) and Rebecca Frank Dallet (2018) joined the Court, in addition to Karofsky.

The rise to a female-majority Supreme Court was far from meteoric. Abrahamson was the first woman on the Supreme Court in 1976, and she remained the only woman justice until former Justice Janine P. Geske was appointed in 1993.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) [reported in March](#) that about 39 percent of justices on the nation's state supreme courts were women. Twelve of those courts have women majorities, compared to just five in 2011. The Washington Supreme Court has one more woman justice than Wisconsin, but the overall percentage of women is lower at about 78 percent, or seven of nine justices.

Wisconsin is just [one of 19](#) state supreme courts with a woman chief justice, and Ziegler is the third woman in a row to hold that title. Roggensack served as chief justice from 2015 to 2021, and Abrahamson held the post from 1996 to 2015.

Wisconsin Court of Appeals

The addition of Grogan to the District II Court of Appeals will bring the percentage of women serving on the intermediate appellate court to about 44 percent, or seven of 16 judges.

The Court of Appeals also gained a woman judge in 2020, with the appointment of Judge Maxine A. White, and two women judges in 2019 – Judge Rachel A. Graham and Judge Jennifer E. Nashold.

In addition to White, Graham, Nashold, Grogan joins Judge Lisa S. Neubauer, Judge Lisa K. Stark, and Judge JoAnne F. Kloppenburg on the Court of Appeals.

The first woman to serve on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals was the late Judge Martha Bablitch, who was elected in 1978, when the intermediate appellate court was created. Bablitch remained the only woman on that court until 1994, when Judge Margaret J. Vergeront was elected.

Wisconsin Circuit Courts

With the addition of the five newly elected judges, the percentage of women judges on the state's [circuit courts](#) will climb to just more than 31 percent, or 79 of 253

judges on Aug. 1.

A decade ago, the Wisconsin circuit court bench consisted of about 14 percent women, according to a [2011 survey](#) conducted on behalf of the National Association of Women Judges. The association posts annual gender diversity survey results for various levels of state and federal courts dating back to 2008 on its [website](#).

Newly elected women circuit court judges who take office Aug. 1:

Christina M. Mayer, Dunn County Circuit Court

Faun Marie Phillipson, Green County Circuit Court

Angelina Gabriele, Kenosha County Circuit Court

Katie B. Kegel, Milwaukee County Circuit Court

Samantha R. Bastil, Sheboygan County Circuit Court

Women circuit court judges who have been appointed by Gov. Tony Evers since Jan. 1, 2021:

Judge Tricia L. Walker, Fond du Lac Circuit Court

Judge LaKeisha D. Haase, Winnebago County Circuit Court

Judge Patricia Baker, Portage County Circuit Court

Elizabeth Rohl, Pierce County Circuit Court

Kristin M. Cafferty, Racine County Circuit Court

Yadira Rein, Outagamie County Circuit Court