

# [***South Carolina making progress to get more women in General Assembly and leadership roles***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTV-2VR1-DYMD-64R7-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** JEFFREY COLLINS, Associated Press

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**Body**

COLUMBIA, S.C. — At first glance, the all-male South Carolina Senate subcommittee deciding whether to approve a proposal to remove the sales tax from feminine hygiene products was a reminder that as recently as 2012 the state had [*no women*](https://apnews.com/article/south-carolina-election-senate-tameika-isaac-devine-c4cdd3029827569eeba78f2dccfe3965) in its Senate.

But progress is being made. The election of a sixth woman to the 46-member Senate in January pulled South Carolina up from last place in the U.S. in the percentage of women in its upper chamber.

No one noted the composition of the all-male Senate Finance subcommittee and they listened to five women speak in favor of [*the bill*](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess125_2023-2024/bills/3563.htm) before ceding the floor to Republican Sen. Katrina Shealy, who broke the chamber's four-year run with no women in 2013.

“I know we have a lot to do, but we can always do one more thing,” said Shealy, who spoke about how important it is to keep products like pads and tampons affordable and available, especially for younger women already struggling in poverty.

The bill, which was approved 114-0 in the House last year, passed through the subcommittee unanimously Wednesday. It now heads to the Senate floor. There are only three weeks left in session, but if anyone has a shot in making sure it gets to the governor's desk, it's Shealy, who got 11 bills where she was primary sponsor passed last session — twice as many as any other senator.

South Carolina women have started organizing to get more of them into political office, from the General Assembly down to school boards.

SC Women in Leadership is in its sixth year encouraging women to run for office, training them to be better candidates and supporting them when they get elected. The group helps Democrats and Republicans.

It's an uphill climb. Just 27 out of the 170 senators and House members in South Carolina are women. That 15.9% is above just West Virginia (11.9%), Tennessee (15.2%) and Mississippi (15.5%), according to the Center for American Women and ***Politics***. Just the addition of Democratic Sen. Tameika Isaac Devine in January boosted South Carolina past a few of those states.

The five women in the Senate in 2023 — three Republicans and two Democrats — banded together to keep South Carolina from passing a [*near-total ban on abortions.*](https://apnews.com/article/abortion-health-legislature-south-carolina-government-and-politics-8bcf83dc17b0958cb806a6bbe91fa6b9) They picked up the nickname the Sister Senators.

Shealy said it shows women can disagree when their political beliefs differ and still come together when their common experiences match.

Women in Leadership said women's experiences are different than men and it's vital their voices are in leadership so they not only get heard, but incorporated into policy. And the group also helps women find spots to serve on government boards and commissions

“'Feminine' traits like empathy, collaboration, and altruism, which women have long been told are weaknesses are, in fact, precisely the traits we need in our leaders,” the group says.

They hold sessions like Presenting Yourself in Person and in the Media, Building Your Campaign Team and Lead Like a Woman.

In 2016 in South Carolina, just seven women ran for state Senate and less than 10 ran for the House. This year, there are 26 women running for Senate and 63 running for the House.

At Wednesday's meeting, University of South Carolina students Thrisha Mote and Anusha Ghosh spoke in favor of the bill. They created a group called No Periods Left Behind.

The group found women who can't afford feminine hygiene products using whatever they have, like a sock, or not changing the items as frequently as necessary, increasing chances for infections, Ghosh said.

“It’s time to acknowledge that menstrual hygiene products are not luxury items but essential necessities for the health and liberty of individuals,” Mote said.

There was more data. South Carolina is one of 21 states that still tax feminine hygiene products. The state would lose about $6 million in revenue.

And after the subcommittee vote, Ghosh and Mote took photos with Shealy, subcommittee Chairman Republican Sen. Tom Davis and others.

There are plenty of other bills that the women of the South Carolina General Assembly said can use their perspective. Republican Sen. Sandy Senn got [*a bill*](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess125_2023-2024/bills/857.htm) through the Senate that would allow for cosmetologists to do hair styling and make up in mobile studios or homes. Currently, those services have to be done in permanent structures.

The state allowed barbers, who are more often male, to open mobile hair cut shops in 2021. Senn said plenty of women preparing for weddings or other formal events would prefer to have their hairdressers come to them.

Senn's bill is awaiting action in the House.

“Hopefully you like us enough to know we’re not evil and we are hopefully going to do good by bringing our perspectives to everything,” Senn said.

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