

## Michigan Women in Sports

### Task Force Report Executive Summary

The Michigan Women in Sports Task Force was created by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2019 to develop strategies to support and promote opportunities in the state for girls and women in sports. Research shows that playing sports has different impacts and benefits for girls compared to boys, and sports participation is a factor in women accessing and succeeding in leadership positions.<sup>1,2</sup> When women lead, decisions are more inclusive, income equality increases, companies are more profitable, and our communities improve.<sup>3</sup> The Task Force's final report to the Governor outlines recommendations developed by state and national leaders to increase equity for Michigan's girls and women in sports – and beyond.



### Checking the Playing Field

Led by Dr. Ketra Armstrong of University of Michigan and Dr. Dan Gould of Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, research<sup>4</sup> was conducted to understand the status and experience of women and girls in sports in Michigan, both participating athletes and sports leaders. Researchers concluded that there is significant work to be done for women and girls to reach their fullest. Highlights of their findings include:

- Girls experience gender disparity and inequities in sports participation and opportunities at an early age which continues through adulthood.
- Socioeconomic status and geography negatively impact girls' participation rates. Girls in Metro Detroit and the Upper Peninsula are especially disadvantaged.
- Women collegiate athletes often receive less investment in terms of funding, visibility, and institutional support.
- Women are underrepresented as staff and athletes of professional sports teams and in sports leadership at colleges and universities including as coaches.
- Gender bias and discrimination, "glass ceilings," and an "old boys club" culture still exist in the workplace.

### Tackling the Issues

Members, assisted by a national advisory board, developed three broad recommendations addressing legislation, policies, programs, and investments. The recommendations provide guidance and actions to increase equity and remove bias as well as grow the number of women and girls who participate and flourish as athletes and leaders. Accountability is a unifying theme across these solutions. Our systems, structures, policies, and people must change and be held accountable to increase and sustain equity and close the gender gap.



**Recommendation 1:** Modernize and expand upon Federal Title IX laws with increased sports-specific protections, compliance, and accountability

**Recommendation 2:** Invest in talent and leadership pathways that explicitly support the growth of women and girls in and through sports

**Recommendation 3:** Engage the public, youth sports and business communities to support solutions for equitable opportunities for girls and women at all levels of sports

## Leaders of Change

The Task Force is comprised of 15 passionate, Michigan change-makers, researchers, and barrier breakers committed to improving sports opportunities and the landscape for women and girls. They have been supported by an Advisory Council consisting of dedicated leaders in sports from across the nation. Members work across all levels of sports and athletics, in the private, non-profit, and public sectors, and are recognized experts in the industry. Since inception, the Task Force has met quarterly to discuss best practices, brainstorm, and hear athlete and leader statements; participated in site visits around the country to understand the national environment; and conducted research to assess Michigan's sports landscape.

### Task Force Members:

Jocelyn Benson (chair), Secretary of State, State of Michigan  
Penny Allen-Cook, Commissioner, Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association  
Ketra Armstrong, Ph.D., Professor of Sport Management, Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, School of Kinesiology, Director, Center for Race & Ethnicity in Sport, University of Michigan  
Kathy Beauregard, Director of Athletics (retired), Western Michigan University  
Keri Becker, Director of Athletics, Grand Valley State University  
Lorin Cartwright, MS, ATC, Athletic Training and Sport Management Consultant/Textbook Author  
Carolyn Cassin, President & CEO, Michigan Women Forward  
Ramona Cox, Ph.D., Director, The Champions Network™, Doc Wayne  
Cali Crawford, Athletic Director, Schoolcraft College  
Joanne Gerstner, Brandt Fellow Sports Journalist in Residence, Michigan State University  
Jennifer Granger, Community Philanthropist  
Mike Guswiler, President, West Michigan Sports Commission  
Carol Hutchins, Head Coach, Softball, University of Michigan  
Samantha Mullet, Offensive Coordinator, Varsity Football, Bear Lake Schools  
Erika Swilley, Vice President, Community and Social Responsibility, Detroit Pistons

Executive Director: Michele Lewis Watts, Ph.D.

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\*Research reports available at [michigan.gov/sos/Resources/Initiatives/task-force-on-women-in-sports](https://michigan.gov/sos/Resources/Initiatives/task-force-on-women-in-sports)



### References

1. Staurowsky, E. J., Watanabe, N., Cooper, J., Cooky, C., Lough, N., Paule-Koba, A., Pharr, Williams, S., Cummings, S., Issokson-Silver, K., & Snyder, M. (2020). *Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges, and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women*. New York, NY: Women's Sports Foundation.
2. Ingram, K. (2020). "Why a female athlete should be your next leader." [https://www.ey.com/en\\_us/athlete-programs/why-female-athletes-should-be-your-next-leader](https://www.ey.com/en_us/athlete-programs/why-female-athletes-should-be-your-next-leader). Accessed May 1, 2022.
3. Women Deliver. (2018, September). *Balancing the Power Equation: Women's Leadership in Politics, Businesses, and Communities* [Policy Brief]. <https://womendeliver.org/womensleadership/>

### Advisory Council Members:

Deborah Antoine, Ph.D., CEO, Women's Sports Foundation  
Neena Chaudhry, General Counsel and Senior Advisor for Education, National Women's Law Center  
Judi Brown Clarke, Vice President for Equity & Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer, Stony Brook University and Health System  
Dan Gould, Ph.D., Professor, Kinesiology, Director, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, Michigan State University  
Richard Lapchick, Ph.D., Founder & Director, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport/Professor, University of Central Florida/Author  
Heather Lyke, Director of Athletics, University of Pittsburgh  
Suzy Merchant, Head Coach, Women's Basketball, Michigan State University  
Heather Mitts Feeley, former US Soccer Olympian, CEO, Gold Medal Mindset  
Patti Phillips, CEO, Women Leaders in College Sports  
Scott Pioli, NFL Analyst, NFL Network  
Sam Rapoport, Senior Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, National Football League  
Meg Seng, Athletic Director, Greenhills School  
Renee Tirado, Equity and Inclusion Thought Leader  
Mark Uyl, Executive Director, Michigan High School Athletic Association  
Mary Wilson, Board Chair & Life Trustee, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

