

ASSEMBLY STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 129

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 16, 2026

The Assembly State and Local Government Committee reports favorably Assembly Resolution No. 129.

As reported, this Assembly Resolution recognizes the history of women's suffrage in New Jersey and honors the first women to cast their ballots in this State more than 200 years ago. New Jersey has a long and complicated history with women's suffrage, as it was one of few states in the nation in which women were granted the right to vote upon our State's founding, only for the right to be taken away over 30 years later.

New Jersey adopted its first constitution on July 2, 1776, which stated, "all inhabitants of the Colony of full Age, who are worth Fifty Pounds...shall be entitled to vote for Representatives in Council and Assembly," granting certain women in New Jersey the right to vote. In 1790, the New Jersey Legislature passed an electoral reform bill for seven of the 13 counties using the pronouns "he or she," further solidifying women's suffrage. In 1797, when a new election law extended the vote to land-owning women Statewide, the proportion of voting women increased, and by 1802, it was reported that eligible women were about 25 percent of total turnout.

This time period produced incredible stories of the exercise of democratic rights, including an 1801 State election in Montgomery Township, Somerset County for which there were 343 voters, nearly 50 of whom were women, which was nearly 14 percent of voters on the list, and included at least four free African American male voters.

Some of the women who bravely voted in the 1801 Montgomery Township election, 119 years before women's right to vote was enshrined in the federal Constitution, were Margaret Heaveday, Mary Davis, Mary Hagerman, Littey VanArsdalen, Mariah Sutton, Live Eatton, Mary McCullough, Caty Fleming, Sarah McMacking, Kesiah Ellis, Susan Ellis, Amy Cheston, Charity Millet Jr., Charity Millet Sr., Unis Lanning (or Lansing), Mary Vorhees, Jane Stuphen, Elizabeth Cork, Betsy Mattison, Mary Merrit, Pheby Davis, Pheby Wiggins, Sarah Camble, Grace Little, Lidia Scott, Mary Norris, Hetty (Betty) Gaw, Hannah Shelton, Eleanor Leonard, Mary

Robertson, Ann Olden, Sarah Johnston, Mary McComb, Ann Mershon, Nancy Oppie, Caty Stout, Nelly Stout, Mary Beltie, Elizabeth Stout, Ruth Carle, Ann VanDike, Rebeka VanDike, Catherine VanDike, Jane Huneman, Sarah VanDike, Anna Leigh, Elizabeth Skillman, and Margaret Dimnes.

Eligible women enjoyed voting rights until 1807, when the New Jersey Legislature passed a law restricting suffrage to tax-paying, White men after accusations of voting fraud were made in an 1807 local election, claiming that men were dressing up as women in order to vote twice after more ballots were cast than there were eligible voters. This was also believed to have been done to give the Democratic-Republican Party an advantage in the 1808 presidential election, since women often voted for the opposing Federalist Party.

In 1844, a second State Constitution was ratified which restricted the right to vote to White male citizens ages 21 and older. Women's suffrage was not granted to New Jerseyans again until the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1920.

Leading up to the ratification of the 19th Amendment, New Jersey women spent over 100 years protesting, bringing legal challenges, attempting to vote, conducting hunger strikes, being verbally and physically attacked by the public and the police, being arrested during protests, authoring papers, and more in a hard-won fight for suffrage. One hundred and six years after the passage of the 19th Amendment, it is important for all New Jerseyans to learn and reflect on the long and complicated history of women's suffrage in this State.