



National Association of Women Lawyers

For Immediate Release

October 27, 2015

For further information contact:

Jenny Waters

312.988.6196

watersj@nawl.org

**Law Firms Have Made No Real Progress in Promoting Women Lawyers in Nearly a Decade,
According to Ninth Annual Survey by National Association of Women Lawyers**

Chicago – Women equity partners at law firms are not much better off than they were in 2006, according to the latest study by the National Association of Women Lawyers® (NAWL). The survey found that law firms have made no appreciable progress in the rate at which they are promoting women to equity partner, and male equity partners continue to be compensated at much higher levels than female equity partners.

In 2006, NAWL issued the NAWL Challenge: increase the number of women equity partners, women chief legal officers, and women tenured law professors to at least 30% by 2015, and it conducted its benchmark survey on this subject. Each year, the survey enables productive discussion by reporting objective statistics regarding the advancement of women lawyers into the highest levels of private practice. For the past 10 years, it has tracked the professional progress of women in the nation's 200 largest law firms by providing a comparative view of the careers and compensation of men and women lawyers at all levels of private practice, as well as by analyzing data about the factors that influence career progression.

This year's law firm results are generally similar to what was reported at the start of the NAWL Challenge nearly a decade ago. According to this year's Report of the Ninth Annual NAWL National Survey on Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms, women comprise 18% of equity partners, up only 2% from the 2006 survey. If the pace of progress over the past 10 years continues, women equity partners will not reach the NAWL Challenge goal of 30% until the year 2181. The author of the report notes that this is "a story of institutional failure." However, the percentage of women in corporate general counsel positions and law school tenured faculty have fared better than women equity partners in law firms. Women now represent approximately 23% of Fortune 500 general counsel (according to a 2015 report by MassMutual) and 37.5% of tenured positions (according to a Catalyst Knowledge Center report from 2015).

"NAWL issued the Challenge to ignite the conversation about the under-representation of women in the legal profession," said NAWL President Marsha L. Anastasia. "We are committed to highlighting these issues and bringing the legal profession together to work on them and share best practices. After all, studies show that having a woman's point of view drives better business results."

As stated in the report: "The gender gap is far more appropriately described as a gender gulf, and achievement of the NAWL Challenge within law firms remains an elusive goal. The survey responses report a level of stagnation with respect to achieving gender parity that ought to serve as a wake-up call to the profession."

Below are some of the survey's key findings: (For the complete report, please visit www.nawl.org/2015nawlsurvey)

- 1) **Firms have made no appreciable progress in the rate at which they are promoting women into the role of equity partner.** Women still only comprise approximately 18% of equity partnership – only 2% higher than in 2006.
- 2) **Men continue to be promoted to non-equity partner status in significantly higher numbers than women.** Among the non-equity partners who graduated from law school in 2004 and later, 38% were women and 62% were men. While this is higher than in 2006, when 26 percent of non-equity partners were women, this data remains vexing in light of the longstanding pipeline of women, as women have been graduating from law school in nearly equal numbers as men for decades.
- 3) **The compensation gender gap remains wide.** Not one of the responding law firms reported having a woman as its highest earner. The typical female equity partner earns 80% of what a typical male equity partner earns, down from 84% in the first survey. Thus, the women have fallen farther behind over the past decade.
- 4) **Women continue to be underrepresented on the highest governance committees.** The typical firm has two women and eight men on their highest U.S.-based governance committee. While the 22 percent female representation is an increase from 16% in 2006, it still only represents one additional woman over a 10-year period. Women do slightly better in achieving these key leadership roles at AmLaw 100 firms, compared to the Second Hundred, but both groups report numbers that demonstrate limited progress when compared to the decades-long pipeline of women in the profession.
- 5) **Women are underrepresented on compensation committees, yet law firms that report more women on their compensation committees have narrower gender pay gaps.** In the firms that reported having two or fewer female members on the compensation committee, the typical female equity partner earns 77% of that earned by a typical male equity partner, compared to 89% in the last survey (the first time this question was asked). In the firms that reported three or more women on the compensation committee, the typical female equity partner earns 87% of that earned by a typical male equity partner, whereas in the last survey the gender pay gap was essentially eliminated.
- 6) **Men continue to outpace women in rainmaking credit.** There is a wider gender gap in client origination credit than in the last survey (the first time this question was asked). Among the firms that provided data regarding the gender of the 10 lawyers who generated the highest revenue, 88% of the top 10 were men and 12% were women, down from 14% in the last survey.
- 7) **Even though female equity partners report higher overall working hours, men continue to generate higher revenues from client billings than women.** The typical female equity partner bills only 78% of what a typical male equity partner bills. When asked to report total client billable and non-billable hours, however, the total hours for women equity partners exceeded the total hours for men equity partners. The median hours reported for women were 2,224 compared to 2,198 for men. This data raises questions about whether committee assignments, hourly billing rates, and the distribution of pro bono hours contribute to disparities in client billings.

- 8) **There are more male associates than female associates in the U.S. offices of the respondents, including at the more junior and senior levels, suggesting that women may be turning to other professions.** Women comprise only 44% of associates, compared to 45% in 2006.
- 9) **The data continues to be challenging for other diverse groups.** Lawyers of color represent 8% of the law firm equity partners. LGBT lawyers comprise 2% of equity partners.
- 10) **Every law firm respondent reported having a women’s initiative, but the budgets allocated are too small to accomplish strategic goals.** This question was first asked in 2012 in NAWL’s Women’s Initiative Survey. At that time, the report noted that “the typical law firm spends far less on its women’s initiatives than the salary of a first-year associate.” This year, 75% of the responding law firms reported having formal budgets for their women’s initiatives. However, there is a significant variance between the median budgets in AmLaw 100 firms and the budgets reported in the Second Hundred. The median annual budget for women’s initiatives in the AmLaw 100 is \$112,500, compared to \$119,000 in 2012; for the Second Hundred, the median annual budget is \$82,000, up 71 percent from \$48,000 in 2012.

Survey Methodology

The NAWL Survey was sent in February 2015 to the 200 largest firms in the United States, as ranked by *The American Lawyer*. The firms were divided into two categories: the AmLaw 100 and the Second Hundred (the firms which rank 101-200 in financial performance). To measure representativeness of the survey sample, survey respondents were compared to the population of the AmLaw 200 firms. Of the 200 firms contacted, 73 responded.

About the National Association of Women Lawyers

The mission of the National Association of Women Lawyers is to provide leadership, a collective voice and essential resources to advance women in the legal profession and advocate for the equality of women under the law. Since 1899, NAWL has been empowering women in the legal profession, cultivating a diverse membership dedicated to equality, mutual support, and collective success. If you are not already a member, please consider joining. NAWL welcomes the membership of individual attorneys, including private practice, corporate, academic, government and non-profit attorneys, and groups, including law firms, corporate legal departments, law schools and bar associations. Learn more at www.nawl.org.

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