

## **“Hear Us”: Echoes for Female Representation Can Still Be Heard Throughout The Statehouse**

*By: Lea Tran and Arielle Appleby*

For two days in October of 1850, 900 people came together to fight for women’s rights at the first National Women’s Rights Convention, in Worcester, Massachusetts, organized by Lucy Stone.

Five years later, she was the keynote speaker in Cincinnati, advocating for women’s rights.

“From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman,” Stone said in 1855, “But the same society that drives forth the young man, keeps woman at home—a dependent—working little cats on worsted, and little dogs on punctured paper; but if she goes heartily and bravely to give herself to some worthy purpose, she is out of her sphere and she loses caste”

Stone, raised in rural Massachusetts, was thrust onto the national stage as she refused to remain unheard and began speaking out on women’s rights. Her image can be found along the walls of Doric Hall in the Massachusetts State House, along with five other more prominent women.

### **“Hear Us” Women’s Leadership Project**

“They tried to focus on women who were not as mainstream,” Gabriel Rosenthal, tour guide for the state house, said.

Though Stone’s story is lesser known, her impact is felt beyond Massachusetts.

The “Hear Us” mural made by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and Susan Sellers is a site in the statehouse that highlights six women who’ve significantly contributed to the quality of Massachusetts public life for women and more. It features Dorothea Dix, Florence Luscomb, Mary Kenney O’Sullivan, Sarah Parker Remond, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Lucy Stone.

It is also the first stop on the Women’s Suffrage section of the Women’s Heritage Trail in Boston. Created by a group of Boston schoolteachers, librarians, and students, the trail is a series of sites spread throughout the greater Boston area telling the stories of many remarkable women who contributed to the state's history.

This piece stands out amongst the other installations found in the state house because of its subjects. Countless paintings of soldiers, past presidents, and male lawmakers dominate the walls of the building but few opportunities to highlight the historical women.

The majority of the statehouse decorations were commissioned during the initial construction in 1798. More were added on throughout the 1890s to 1920s.

“The 1920s can be generously described as a boy's club,” Rosenthal said, “This is just one part of the efforts to try to get some diversity of people and thoughts and ideas into the building rather than your standard colonial aspects or early governmental aspects, which were very well male-dominated.”

“Hear Us” is one of three sites in the statehouse dedicated to women. The site addresses the lack of representation of women in the state’s history, a continuing issue our female legislators face today. Nearly 175 years since Stone organized the first Women’s Rights convention, women legislators today are still making efforts to ensure their voices are heard.

### **Women Today: Margaret Scarsdale**

In 2022, Margaret Scarsdale was elected as the new Representative for the first Middlesex district, winning by just seven votes against her opponent, Andrew Shepard.

She is the 234th woman sworn in at the Massachusetts Statehouse over the 300-plus years the legislature has operated. In that time, over 20,000 male representatives have served.

“We are way, way, way behind,” Scarsdale said on a phone interview, “There's almost like this entrance into a club already, if you happen to be a male and they have, it's just like an inside track in some ways, and being a female, you're on the outside trying to get in.”

Scarsdale is a part of The Women’s Caucus for the Massachusetts Legislature, created in 1975 with the mission to support women in all levels of government. The group is also a community and a way to “ground ourselves and sharpen our voices” according to Scarsdale.

One legislative priority for the group is passing Bill 2546, an act to increase accessibility to disposable menstrual products. Other significant legislative efforts the group has made include prenatal wage protection and sexual assault awareness.

“I wouldn't say it only benefits women, everybody benefits if there's good hygiene and things like that,” Scarsdale said.

Despite the legislative remaining male dominated, Scarsdale has noticed some change. Her 2022 class had 14 newly elected female representatives with the majority being women of color. In 2025, women make up 31% of state legislation, with 62 women currently serving on a general court of 200 seats.

“If you only have one kind of voice at the table, you get one kind of solution,” Scarsdale said, “So having more voices at the table, all perspectives are as many as possible, is, that's the way to build a sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive future.”

The caucus celebrated its 50th anniversary in August 2025. Members of the organization spoke about the struggles of women in politics and the accomplishments they've made.

“For so long within our history, men have dominated political spaces. This year is celebrating and recognizing the women that have stepped up to serve. It’s also recognizing the work that we need to do to make sure that we have representation.” said the Senate Chair of the caucus, Senator Robyn Kennedy, in a Boston Globe article on Aug. 2025.

Governor Maura Healy, the first elected female Massachusetts, said in a statement to the Globe, “We’re proof that when women are leading, we get things done.”

## **Legacy of Lucy Stone**

Stone shared a similar sentiment with the women in the caucus centuries earlier.

“I believe that the influence of women will save the country before every other power,” Stone said at the 1869 Equal Rights Convention.

Stone dedicated her life to activism, ensuring all marginalized groups had an opportunity to be heard. She became nationally-renowned not only as a public speaker, but for her work during the Civil War, supporting the ratification of the 14th and 15th amendments, which granted voting rights to black men, and speaking up for the women’s right to vote.

Her legacy continued in Boston, founding the American Woman Suffrage Association, which focused on achieving the women’s right to vote with state-by-state campaigns. She later published the Women’s Journal, which was “devoted to the interests of Woman, to her educational, industrial, legal and political Equality, and especially to her rights of Suffrage.”

Her bronze bust along with the five other women in “Hear Us” reminds us of constant battles women have faced just to be heard. The site features notable quotes said by each woman along with copies of landmark legislations each contributed to.

“We tried to make [the women's] voices audible through physical form,” Artist Bretteville said in an interview with the Boston Herald at the unveiling.

Specifically installed in front of Doric Hall, which was once the entrance to the statehouse in 1999, “Hear Us” would have been the first image anyone saw: legislators, assistants, tours and visitors, when entering the statehouse.

In 2001, the statehouse moved their entrance for security purposes. Now, the site is often only seen when guests take a guided tour of the statehouse as “Hear Us” is the last stop.

“We still take people here on the tour, but it has shifted from what it would have virtually been,” Rosenthal said.