



We rise by lifting others

*2026 Annual Ella T. Grasso
Women's
Leadership
Brunch*



Sunday, June 14th, 2026
AQUA TURF CLUB
PLANTSVILLE, CT

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Congratulations

Women's Leadership Brunch 2026 Award Recipients

Ella T. Grasso Award
Mary Mushinsky

1st District Awards
Cindi Lloyd & Tejal Vallam

2nd District Awards
Dorothy Grady & JoAnn Merolla-Martin

3rd District Awards
Theresa Conroy & Tyisha Walker-Meyers

4th District Awards
Denese Deeds & Gabriela Koc

5th District Awards
Jill Drew & Fran Tepperman



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Governor Ella T. Grasso



Ella Grasso, née Ella Rosa Giovanna Oliva Tambussi, was born May 10, 1919, in Windsor Locks. She was a US Congresswoman and the first woman elected to a U.S. state governorship in her own right.

Early in her career, Grasso was active in local Democratic politics. She was elected to the state legislature in 1952 and reelected in 1954. From 1956-58 she sat on the Democratic National Committee. In 1958, she was elected Connecticut's Secretary of the State and served three terms. In 1970 and 1972, she was elected to

Congress from Connecticut's 6th District.

Grasso announced her gubernatorial candidacy in January of 1974. With support from Party Chair John Bailey's stateside Democratic organization, Grasso won the gubernatorial race of 1974 and made history by becoming the first woman elected Governor in any state without succeeding a husband. In September of 1978, she fought off a primary challenge and was nominated for a second term. Grasso was a popular governor and won re-election with a large majority.

Ella Grasso resigned as governor on December 31, 1980 because of illness. She died on February 5, 1981.



Future CT Dems Chair Nancy DiNardo with Gov. Grasso in 1975

Congratulations
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2026 Award Recipients

*First
Congressional
District*

Cindi Lloyd



Cindi Lloyd is a lifelong resident of Bloomfield, who says the community's outstanding schools, supportive environment and strong family values have helped shape her personal, professional and political journey.

She was the first Black woman to be hired by the Bloomfield Police Department, where she developed critical leadership and decision-making skills while earning Bachelors' and Masters' degrees in Human Services from Springfield College.

In 2002, she became the first woman and the first Black to serve as Chief of Security for the Hartford Board of Education, overseeing operations at 42 schools and more than 100 officers.

For the past 18 years, Cindi has served as a Special Investigator for the Connecticut State Treasurer's Office.

In 2023, Cindi was elected to the Bloomfield Town Council, and most recently was chosen by the Council members to serve as Deputy Mayor. She's also a proud mother and grandmother who enjoys motorcycles, dancing, travel, and fine dining.

Tejal Vallam



Tejal "TJ" Vallam is the chair of the Rocky Hill Democratic Town Committee, a proud small business owner, a wife, and a mother.

TJ's passion for community service and local politics runs in the family. Her parents were deeply involved in the local Indian community, and her grandfather and uncles marched alongside Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle for India's independence.

Inspired by this legacy, TJ strives to give back to the country that has offered her family such remarkable opportunities, while also honoring her heritage. She is a voice for Democratic values, including women's rights, political equality, diversity, and inclusion.

TJ has held leadership roles in a range of organizations, serving as both Editor and Vice President of the India Association of Central Connecticut. She has also served on committees for several local temples and currently sits on the Board of Directors of the Vallabhdham Temple in Newington.

Congratulations
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2026 Award Recipients

Second Congressional District

Dorothy Grady



Dorothy Grady was called to activism in the 1960s amid the civil rights movement and the fight for the Voting Rights Act; the opposition to the Vietnam War and the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

The mother of three boys, she was a school volunteer and PTO president. As Coventry's Human Services Director, she learned the impact of legislation on people's lives, and organized the town hall supervisors to become AFSCME members.

Dorothy chaired the Coventry DTC for 19 years, organizing headquarters and supporting campaigns. She was a delegate for Jerry Brown at the 1992 DNC, and for Bill Clinton in 1996.

She worked as a caseworker for Congressman Joe Courtney and celebrated the passage of the Affordable Care Act. In 2024 as a Presidential Elector, she cast her ballot for Kamala Harris.

She served as Deputy and Registrar of Voters and today helps new citizens become voters through the Secretary of the State's Office.

JoAnn Merolla-Martin



JoAnn Merolla-Martin is serving her second term as Registrar of Voters in Norwich, having dedicated a good part of her career to ensuring free and fair elections, including several years as an Election Monitor for the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, and decades as an election worker.

A native of New York, she made Connecticut her home after attending UConn. As an employee of Mansfield Training School, she joined the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, and learned that politics had a major impact on jobs, health and retirement. She was an active union member for 25 years, including five as an organizer. That union experience

ensured a lifelong membership in the Democratic party.

As a 20-plus year member of the Norwich Democratic Town Committee, JoAnn has volunteered on countless local and statewide campaigns, making calls, knocking on doors, and serving as Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer.

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Third Congressional District

Theresa Conroy



Theresa W. Conroy is a lifelong Seymour resident, Family Nurse Practitioner, former State Representative, and dedicated community leader.

A graduate of Seymour High School, Quinnipiac University, Southern Connecticut State University, and Fairfield University, she spent much of her career serving veterans through the VA Connecticut Healthcare System as a clinician and healthcare leader.

Theresa represented Seymour, Beacon Falls, and Derby in the General Assembly, where she championed healthcare access, advanced practice nursing, education, and community development. As a legislator, she helped secure millions of dollars in state funding for local school and recreational facility improvements.

Theresa has served on numerous local boards and organizations, including the Seymour Board of Selectpersons, Zoning Board of Appeals, Affordable Housing Partnership, Seymour Pumpkin Festival, and Seymour Historical Society.

She is also the author of *Images of America: Seymour* and remains a passionate advocate for her community, civic engagement, and public health.

Tyisha Walker-Meyers



Tyisha Walker-Meyers was born and raised in New Haven and was one of 17 new members elected to the New Haven Board of Alders in 2011. In 2015, she became the Alders' first African American President.

She has a long record of involvement in campaigns that impact Connecticut and the nation, including voter registration in Virginia for the Obama campaign, supporting LGBTQ rights in Yale contracts, passing landmark health care reform bills, rallying against police brutality and standing up for immigrant rights.

As a New Haven Alder, Tyisha has helped return community policing, creation of New Haven

Works and stepped-up commitment from Yale to hire 1000 local residents. Most recently, she is leading advocacy for more affordable housing.

As a longtime employee of Yale, Tyisha has taken a leadership role in union organizing, helping to negotiate raises and benefits for more than 5,000 workers that are considered some of the best contracts in the country.

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*Fourth
Congressional
District*

Denese Deeds



Denese Deeds has supported Democratic causes and candidates all her adult life, volunteering for local and national campaigns and organizations.

While she ran for public office, she prefers to work behind the scenes. She's served as Treasurer of the Shelton Democratic Town Committee since 2005. She volunteered on the Obama campaigns, and on every single Jim Himes campaign.

Denese has been a girl scout leader, active in the local parent organization, and served as treasurer of the Shelton Friends of the Library.

She's had a successful career in industrial hygiene, protecting workers from chemical hazards.

In 1980 she co-founded a consulting company with her husband to provide comprehensive safety and health services to small and large companies. She is the recipient of several prestigious awards in her field and serves on a United Nations Committee on chemical safety.

Gabriela Koc



In just a few years, Gabriela Koc has made an impact in Connecticut and the region.

In 2020, she organized a Black Lives Matter march in Shelton that drew hundreds in one of the state's most conservative areas. In 2021, she became the first woman of color to lead the Connecticut Young Democrats.

She has served as Eastern Vice President for the Young Democrats of America, on the State Central Committee, and the Stamford Democratic City Committee.

As Deputy Political Director for Governor Lamont's 2022 campaign, she focused on Latino voter engagement and coalition-building. She also served as liaison between the Connecticut Hispanic Democratic Caucus and State Party.

In Stamford, she is Vice President of the Board of Education. She was recognized at the Mujeres Destacadas Awards.

Her leadership development includes the Jordan-Huerta Fellowship at People for the American Way, The Campaign School at Yale, the Latino Leadership Academy, PLTI, and her current fellowship with the Latina Leadership Institute.

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*Fifth
Congressional
District*

Jill Drew



Jill Drew became a political activist in 2016, after a remarkable career in journalism with the Washington Post and New York Newsday. She helped flip the 64th House District as campaign manager for first-time candidate Maria Horn in 2018.

She was elected chair of the Sharon Democratic Town Committee in 2020. Following the 2024 election, Jill launched Today's Action, which started as a six-day-a-week eblast that highlighted one tangible act of resistance people could take each day and blurbs about upcoming political events. Today's Action is now published on Substack twice a week.

Jill is a member of the Sharon Volunteer Ambulance Squad, volunteers with the Sharon Land Trust, and directs the steering committee of an immigrant support group, Vecinos Seguros 2.

She is General Manager of Drew Associates, a documentary film company founded by her late father-in-law, cinéma vérité pioneer Robert Drew.

Fran Tepperman



Fran Tepperman has brought experience in journalism and public relations to her political activism in Southbury. She started her career in PR and publicity for Capital Cities/ABC in New York, and later joined Connecticut's Voices Newspaper, reporting on municipal government, community events and local businesses.

She also served as School/Home/Community Liaison for Pomperaug Regional School District 15; Vice Chair of the Southbury Film Commission and led the Southbury Junioresettes for nearly a decade, mentoring young women in leadership, volunteerism and civic engagement.

She joined the Southbury DTC in 2017, serving as Communications Chair and a member of the Executive Committee. She has managed campaign messaging, media outreach, fundraising, volunteer

coordination, events and compliance reporting. She served in a leadership role for Jeff Desmarais' 2020, 2022 and 2024 campaigns for state Senate, and for Southbury's First Selectman campaigns from 2019 through 2025.

In 2025 she celebrated her first campaign victory when Tim O'Neil was elected First Selectman.

Congratulations
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2026 Award Recipients

Ella T. Grasso Award



Mary Mushinsky

Mary Mushinsky was first elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1980 on a platform of environmental activism, consumer advocacy and improved energy policies. She currently holds the leadership position of Assistant Deputy Speaker Pro Tempore.

Mary has held various leadership positions including co-chair of the legislature's bipartisan Program Review and Investigations Committee, specializing in preparing

workforce for a changing economy, retraining older and long-term unemployed workers, apprenticeships, and improving efficiency of state programs. Mary previously served as co-chair of the legislature's Select Committee on Children, helping pass the state's anti-bullying law. She is the recipient of numerous awards for adolescent pregnancy prevention and reduction of child poverty.

She served for six years as co-chair of the legislature's Environment Committee. A biologist by training, Mary has been the legislature's chief proponent of major environmental legislation enacted during the 1980s and 1990s, including mandatory recycling, packaging reduction, open-space preservation, global warming mitigation and endangered species protection laws.

Mary was member of the Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes and the Results-Based Accountability Working Group to achieve greater efficiencies in taxpayer-funded programs, as well as the Peak Oil Caucus to reduce the impact of high oil prices on residents and businesses. She serves on the Manufacturing Caucus and the Sportsmen's Caucus.

In Wallingford, Mary initiated and serves as co-chair of the Quinnipiac River Linear Trail Advisory Committee and as a member of the Wallingford Energy Conservation Commission. Mary is a member and legislative liaison for the Coalition for a Better Wallingford, which seeks to reduce drug and alcohol abuse.

Mary lives in Wallingford with her husband Martin J. Waters and has two adult sons, Martin and Edward Waters.

Ned
LAMONT
★
GOVERNOR

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S

Ella T. Grasso Award Recipient
Rep. Mary Mushinsky

**AND TO ALL THE WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP HONOREES**

Cindi Lloyd	Tejal Vallam
Dorothy Grady	JoAnn Merolla-Martin
Tyisha Walker-Myers	Theresa Conroy
Denese Deeds	Gabriela Koc
Jill Drew	Fran Tepperman

*Thank you for your leadership, dedication,
and service to Connecticut.*

*I also want to give a special congratulations to
Gabriela Koc, my campaign treasurer.
I hope you treasure this event.*

-Ned Lamont



35TH DISTRICT

"13 Communities, One voice"

DEMOCRATS

The 13 towns of Connecticut's 35th District proudly thank Dorothy Grady for her years of dedicated service.

Her impact has reached far beyond our district, strengthening communities across Connecticut. We are honored to celebrate her and grateful to call her one of our own.

With sincere appreciation,
The 13 Towns of the 35th State
Senate District.



*Thank
you!*

Paid for by Cris Jimenez, 35th Senatorial Committee Treasurer





**THANK YOU &
CONGRATULATIONS
DEMOCRATIC WOMEN LEADERS**

Your leadership and dedication to women, Connecticut, and the Democratic Party is truly special. Thank you for all you do for our communities!



Mary Mushinsky

Ella T. Grasso Award Winner

Women's Leadership Honorees:

**Cindi Lloyd
Dorothy Grady
Tyisha Walker-Meyers
Denese Deeds
Jill Drew**

**Tejal Vallam
JoAnn Morrella-Martin
Theresa Conroy
Gabriela Koc
Fran Tepperman**

On behalf of the
**HARDWORKING
UNION WOMEN**
who make Connecticut run,

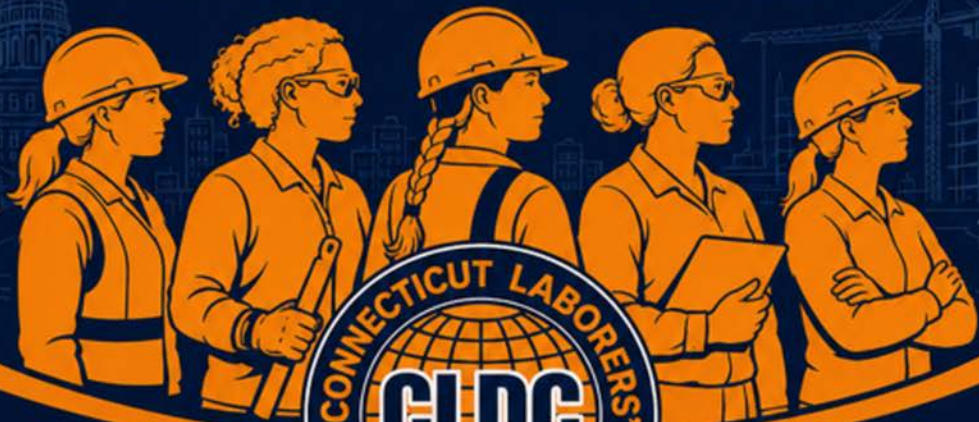


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★ ★ ★ — *congratulates* — ★ ★ ★

Mary Mushinsky

AND ALL OF TODAY'S HONOREES.





Laurel
LaPorte-Grimes
★
DEMOCRAT FOR STATE SENATE

Congratulations

MARY MUSHINSKY

AND ALL OUR
WOMEN LEADERS!!!

CINDI LLOYD & TEJAL VALLAM

DOROTHY GRADY & JOANN MEROLLA-
MARTIN

TYISHA WALKER-MEYERS & THERESA
CONROY

DENESE DEEDS & GRABRIELA KOC

JILL DREW & FRAN TEPPERMAN



*The 2026 Ella T. Grasso
Women's Leadership Brunch*

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Congratulations

to the 2026 Connecticut Democratic Women

Leadership Awards Honorees

The Honorable Mary Mushinsky

Ella T. Grasso Award

The Honorable Tyisha Walker-Meyers

The Honorable Theresa Conroy

3rd Congressional District

My deepest thanks and appreciation to all of those honored for their good work, especially my dear friends from Connecticut's 3rd Congressional District!

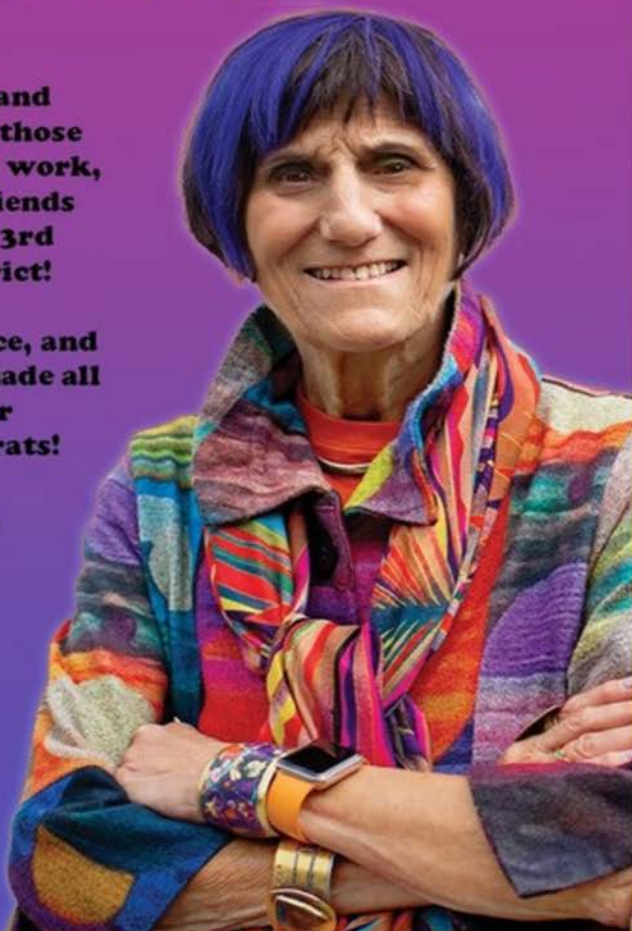
Your strength, guidance, and fierce advocacy have made all the difference for Connecticut Democrats!

**You are the heart and spirit of our Party--
We could not do it without you!**

You're the best!

Rosa

Paid for by Friends of Rosa
DeLauro, Patrick Charmel, Treasurer





REP. JOE COURTNEY CELEBRATES

**THE 2026 ELLA T. GRASSO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
CT-02 HONOREES & AWARD WINNER**



Heartiest congratulations to Dorothy Grady and JoAnn Morrella-Martin on being honored for their dynamic leadership! Every election in CT-02 is hard-fought, and Dorothy and JoAnn continue to impress with their steadfast determination and tireless commitment to winning at the local, state, and federal levels. Dorothy's work in my office helping constituents with Social Security and Medicare made a huge difference in improving the lives of thousands of seniors.

A special shoutout to my former colleague in the General Assembly, Mary Mushinsky, this year's Ella Grasso Award recipient.

You all would make Ella T. Grasso proud!

Joe
COURTNEY
For Congress | 2ND DISTRICT

Paid for by Courtney for Congress



Congratulations

to all of this year's District Recipients,
and special congratulations to
Rep. Mary Mushinsky, a longtime
friend and this year's Ella T. Grasso
Award recipient.



JASON
ROJAS **PAC**



CT DEMS

Congratulations to Jill Drew Sharon DTC Chairwoman



Joe Baker & Audrey Blondin

*from all of your
Friends in the
30th District*

*Bethlehem, Brookfield, Canaan,
Cornwall, Goshen, Kent, Litchfield,
Morris, New Fairfield, New Milford,
North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon,
Sherman, Torrington, Winchester,
Warren, Washington*

Paid for by Audrey B. Blondin





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CONGRATULATIONS TO
TEJAL VALLAM
& ALL OF TODAY'S HONOREES!



DEMS

women belong in all places
where decisions are being made

CT DEMS

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