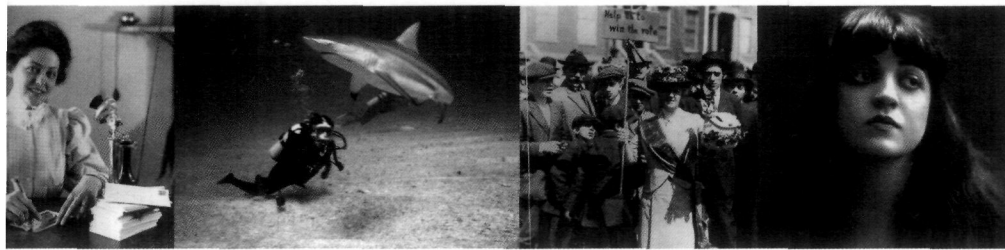


W O M E N



OF

ACHIEVEMENT

IN MARYLAND

HISTORY

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ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

Helen L. Koss

1922-, MONTGOMERY COUNTY

... *broke the gender barrier in the House of Delegates* ...

The Honorable Helen L. Koss represented the citizens of the Eighteenth District in Montgomery County in the Maryland House of Delegates for four terms, from 1971 until her retirement from the General Assembly in 1987. In 1979, the Bennington College graduate broke the gender barrier in the House of Delegates when she became the first woman appointed to chair a standing committee, the Constitutional and Administrative Law Committee, a position she held from 1979 to 1987 (Maryland Women's Hall of Fame).

Prior to her years as an elected official, Delegate Koss had served as president of the League of Women Voters of Maryland. During her tenure, which began in 1963, the league addressed civil-rights issues and focused primarily on public accommodations. In 1967, as a delegate to the Maryland Constitutional Convention, she chaired the Committee on Suffrage and Elections.

Once elected to the House of Delegates, Koss was responsible for introducing legislation on consumer protection and safety, discrimination, displacement of homemakers, the election process, ethics, and the handicapped. One of Delegate Koss's landmark achievements as a legislator was passage of the Displaced Homemakers Bill, establishing the first multipurpose center to counsel and train homemakers as they moved toward financial independence. Koss also facilitated the funding of this program with state monies generated by automobile license plates. The program, a model nationwide, has since expanded to include several centers throughout Maryland.

In helping women become self-sufficient, Koss saw firsthand the ramifications of gender discrimination. She battled to prevent sex discrimination from affecting a woman's credit rating, insurance premiums, and housing costs. She also fought for equitable faculty salaries. In addition, she protected the elderly, eliminating age as a consideration for loans, retail credit, and installment accounts, and then stiffened penalties for violating the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. She also sponsored legislation that exempted property from assessment based on building improvements or changes required for handicapped or ill residents.

Regarding ethics, Koss sponsored legislation that disqualified persons who had been convicted of bribery from doing business with Maryland government offices; it also prohibited officials from using elective office for financial gain. To inform voters, Koss made available, by law, pamphlets containing voter information, and then she required the state's election board to distribute the pamphlets before every general election (Koss).

For her service to Maryland, Koss was elected into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 1997. She also received awards from the American Association of University Professors, the Maryland chapter of the National Organization for Women, the American Association of University Women, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

In her long career as a public servant, Koss has been a distinguished, accomplished, and articulate advocate for consumer protection, campaign-finance reform, open meetings and election-law reform. Also, while a committed advocate for women's rights, she fights for equal rights for all Maryland citizens, both female and male. State and national organizations have frequently recognized her many contributions. Helen Koss has indeed made a positive impact on Maryland citizens, and her influence will carry them into the future. ✿



COURTESY OF THE MARYLAND WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME