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Women From Across the State Gather for the

Inaugural Conference of Women Leading Government, Alabama Chapter

Pelham, AL...Karen Pinkos, City Manager in El Cerrito, California and ICMA President, was joined by a slate of Alabama local government executives as the newly formed state chapter of Women Leading Government (WLG) held its Inaugural Conference on Monday, February 25, 2019, at the Pelham Civic Complex & Ice Arena. Over 140 women, representing more than 20 municipalities and counties from across the state, gathered to network and take advantage of educational opportunities offered at the conference.



Chapter organizer, Gretchen DiFante, Pelham City Manager, visited with Governor Kay Ivey last week in Montgomery and shared the mission and plans for the state chapter. In a letter Governor Ivey asked to be read at the conference, she commented, “Many of you did not plan for a career in local government. In fact, like me, your path was not predetermined or even perhaps likely.” The Governor goes on to describe growing up in Camden, Alabama at a time and place where little girls didn’t dream of becoming governor one day. “Governor Ivey was an inspiration to me as I made the decision to leave New York State after 28 years and come back home to Alabama to serve as its only female city manager,” said DiFante. “When Cheryl Kidd (Council Administrator for the City of Birmingham) and I began researching the national organization and spoke to chapter presidents in Arizona, Colorado, Arkansas, California and Texas, they all encouraged us to simply start a conversation and people would show up hungry to talk about how women could work together to make an even greater impact in their communities.”

“The feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive. Prior to the conference, I received an email or text every other day from women thanking us for starting this conversation, and since Monday, the appreciation has kept coming in,” said DiFante. “Women want to share their passion for serving in their communities with young girls to encourage them to pursue careers in local government. One of the most impactful responses I received after the conference was from a woman who told me she was going to ask a man to mentor her for the first time. The importance of working in concert and collaboration with our male teammates was an important aspect of the conference,” added DiFante.

The conference theme, “Leading with Character and Confidence,” follows WLG’s mission of encouraging women to pursue careers in local government and through networking and education and help prepare women for success in the unique communities across our state.

The Honorable Sybil Cleveland, Municipal Judge in Huntsville, Michelle Rodrigues, Ph.D., Director of Human Resources, Jefferson County and joined Pinkos, DiFante and Kidd as conference speakers.

Conference luncheon attendees included Representative April Weaver, Chair of the Shelby County Delegation; Peggy Martin, Chair of the Russell County Commission, ACCMA President LeAnn Horne Jefferson County Manager Tony Petelos, Mountain Brook City Manager Sam Gaston, Brian Muenger, City Manager, Pell City and Tim Westhoven, Chief Operations Officer, City of Hoover. Councilwomen Stacy Rakestraw of Alabaster and Beth McMillan of Pelham were also in attendance.

Alabama became the twelfth state to welcome a Women Leading Government Chapter. WLG is a partner organization to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) whose 12,000 members seek to share a commitment to local government excellence and dedication to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. Alabama WLG is a partner organization to The Alabama City/County Management Association (ACCMA) which also served as a conference sponsor.