

## Foreword

IN THE FALL of 2000, Professor Alan Rosenthal of Rutgers University convened a conference of legislative scholars and users of legislative research at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on the Rutgers campus. The purpose of the conference, entitled “Using Legislative Research,” was twofold: (1) to identify topics for legislative research that would be beneficial to the user community and (2) to seek ways to make political science research more useful to legislators and legislative staff. The user group was made up primarily of representatives of three national organizations of state officials: the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the Council of State Governments (CSG), and the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLLF).

There was a strong consensus among attendees at this conference that the impact of term limits was the most important topic for collaborative research between scholars and the user community. At the time of the conference, nineteen states had enacted term limits beginning in 1991, and those limits were just beginning to take effect in the states. By necessity, previous studies of term limits had been either single-state studies or speculative, forward-looking analyses. The participants agreed that the time was ripe for a national, comparative study of the impacts of term limits on the legislative institution.

As a result of the conference, a smaller team was formed for the Joint Project on Term Limits (JPTL). The JPTL team met in January 2001 in the Denver office of the NCSL to design the project that resulted in this edited volume. After funding was obtained, the project team began research in the fall of 2001 and continued through 2004.

Because legislatures play such an important role in our democracy, we believe that it is critical that citizens and policymakers understand the effects of term limits and make adjustments to ensure that legislatures remain effective institutions of representative democracy. The JPTL study examined the impact of term limits on legislatures' capacity for policy-making, the types of members elected, internal legislative operations, and relationships among the branches of government. The goal of the project was not to revisit the debate over whether or not there should be term limits but, rather, to aid citizens in understanding term limit effects and to help legislatures to mitigate the negative influences of term limit reform while building on its positive impacts.

This joint project among three national organizations of state legislators and a group of legislative scholars was a unique collaborative effort. Not only was it the first time the three national organizations had undertaken a joint project, but it was also the first time that legislative scholars and the users of legislative research had joined together to identify a priority research topic and collaborate on carrying it out. We hope that this project is a model for future mutually beneficial research.

The project team was managed by Jennifer Drage Bowser, Rich Jones, and Karl Kurtz of NCSL. The team thanks Matthew Jarvis—then a graduate student at the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley—for research assistance and data analysis. For assistance in preparing the manuscript for this book, the team thanks Amy Barse of NCSL.

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