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Nicole Earle Appointed As Maryland Racing Commission Chair

Press Release

Fri, June 5, 2026 at 3:44 PM EDT · 3 min read

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Nicole Earle Appointed As Maryland Racing Commission Chair

Key takeaways

- Nicole Earle
Maryland Racing Commission

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Governor W. George Moore has appointed Nicole Earle to chair the Maryland Racing Commission. She is the first woman and first African American to serve in this state leadership role, and her tenure will begin on June 10, 2026. George Mahoney, outgoing chair, will continue to serve as a Commission member.

"Nicole Earle is the right leader at the right time and I am proud to appoint her as Chair of the Maryland Racing Commission," said Gov. Moore. "This appointment is a historic milestone for Maryland and I am confident her expertise and experience will guide her while leading our horse racing industry."

"The horse racing industry is in an exciting chapter of transformation as we prepare for a revitalized Pimlico," said Maryland Department of Labor secretary Portia Wu. "Ms. Earle's extensive expertise in development finance and community investment makes her uniquely suited for this role. She brings a vital perspective that ensures Maryland racing remains an economic engine that uplifts local communities and that we uphold the integrity of this Maryland tradition."

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Earle is the president and CEO of Dominion Real Estate and Dominion Community Development Corporation and has over two decades of experience in the real estate industry. She has financed and managed over \$1 billion in real estate projects focusing on economic growth, affordable housing, and community revitalization. She has served as a member of the Maryland Racing Commission for a year.

A prominent leader in the Park Heights community, Earle previously served as a Commercial Community Development Lender for Fulton Bank and as Development Manager for the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, where she managed complex projects like the \$400 million Uplands mixed-income

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"It is an honor to welcome Ms. Earle to the Maryland Racing Commission during this important period for Maryland racing," said incoming Maryland Racing Commission chair Nicole Earle. "I look forward to working with my fellow Commissioners and industry stakeholders to uphold the integrity of racing, support a safe and vibrant racing environment, and contribute to the success of Maryland racing as investments in Pimlico and Laurel shape a sustainable future for this longstanding Maryland tradition."

"I am thrilled to welcome Ms. Earle as our new chairperson, after a year of service as a Commission member," said Maryland Racing Commission executive director Chris Merz. "Her impressive background in large-scale project analysis and strategy will be a vital asset to this leadership role. I look forward to working closely alongside her as we honor Maryland's rich racing heritage while building a modern and sustainable future for the sport."

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The chair of the Maryland Racing Commission leads the nine-member body appointed by the Governor to regulate thoroughbred, standardbred and pari-mutuel wagering in Maryland. Key responsibilities include presiding over the commission during meetings, overseeing hearings on appeals, and participating in decisions involving licensing, disciplinary actions, racing dates, purse structures, and regulatory approvals.

Maryland Racing Commission is dedicated to safeguarding health and safety in horse racing, enforcing rules for fair racing, and protecting the public through transparent betting operations. Committed to the highest standards of equine welfare, jockey safety, and regulatory integrity, the Commission supports horse racing as a cherished Maryland tradition and a high-value economic driver that supports thousands of jobs across the state.

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'There is freedom': Why Asian women are leaving their husbands in their 50s and 60s

Jessie Yeung, Yumi Asada, CNN

Sun, July 26, 2026 at 12:01 AM EDT · 8 min read



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Eiko Toyama

Throughout their marriage, she said, she did all the housework and childcare in their Japan home, as well as supporting the family financially. Her husband "wanted to control everything," from her social life to professional ambitions, leaving her feeling trapped and miserable. Still, she stuck it out for their two children.

That finally changed when she turned 60. Her adult sons no longer needed her, and her husband was healthy – not yet so old that he needed a caretaker. It was a precious window of opportunity, and she took it.

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"I was nothing but happy (after the divorce). That was my only emotion," she said. "I was so happy I wanted to run around all over the place."

Stories like hers are increasingly common around the world as the number of ["gray divorces"](#) – splits among couples aged 50 and older – rises each year. The trend has been seen in countries like the [United States](#) and elsewhere, but takes on particular significance in Asia, where people generally live longer.

Many places like South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China are battling demographic crises as birth rates fall and elderly populations swell.

The surge in gray divorces is also often driven by women – who have long faced restrictive gender norms in conservative Asian societies, as well as legal, financial, and social barriers to seeking divorce. That's now changing; in Japan, for instance, among couples splitting after decades of marriage, [twice as many women](#) as men filed for divorce in 2024.

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uncommon – and often met with judgment and shame.

Back then, if you were a woman, "getting divorced was kind of like the end of life," said Sangyoub Park, an associate professor of sociology at Washburn University in Kansas, who wrote [a 2023 paper](#) on late-life divorces in South Korea.

That began changing in the second half of the 20th century as more women joined the workforce and pursued higher education. Gray divorces have risen steadily – particularly as Gen X began entering its 50s in the past decade, Park said.

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That's an important demographic: born between 1965 and 1980, Gen X was the first generation to grow up in a globalizing Asia, watching American TV and movies. Through pop culture, they also absorbed American values such as prioritizing "personal choices rather than family obligation," which – alongside those broader economic factors – helped gradually shift attitudes toward divorce, Park said.



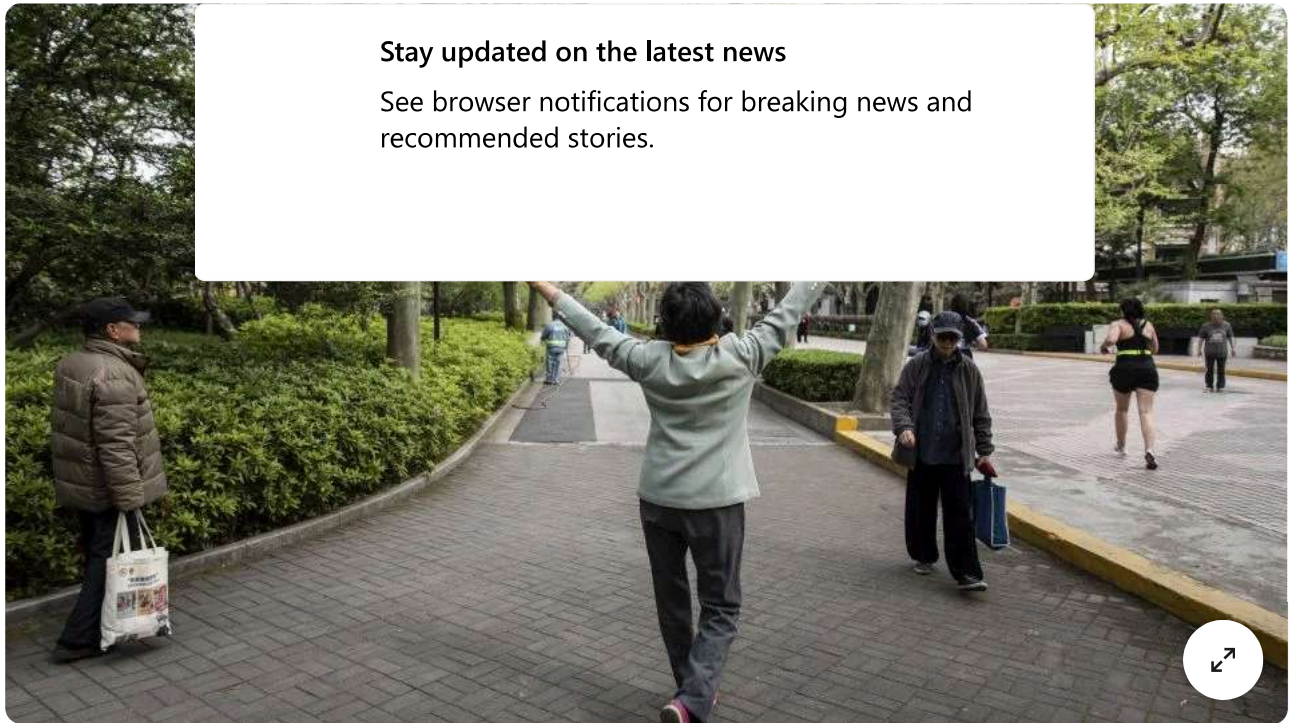
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Elderly people walk through a park in Shanghai, China, on April 10, 2021. - Qilai Shen/Bloomberg/Getty Images

That's reflected in data around the region. In South Korea last year, the number of divorces among couples who had been married at least 30 years surpassed divorces among younger couples who were married less than five years – for the first time ever.

Taiwan has also seen divorces increase among long-married couples, according to government data. In Hong Kong, multiple [law firms](#) have described a [surge in gray divorces](#), and in mainland China, the number of elderly divorces has [doubled in the past 30 years](#).

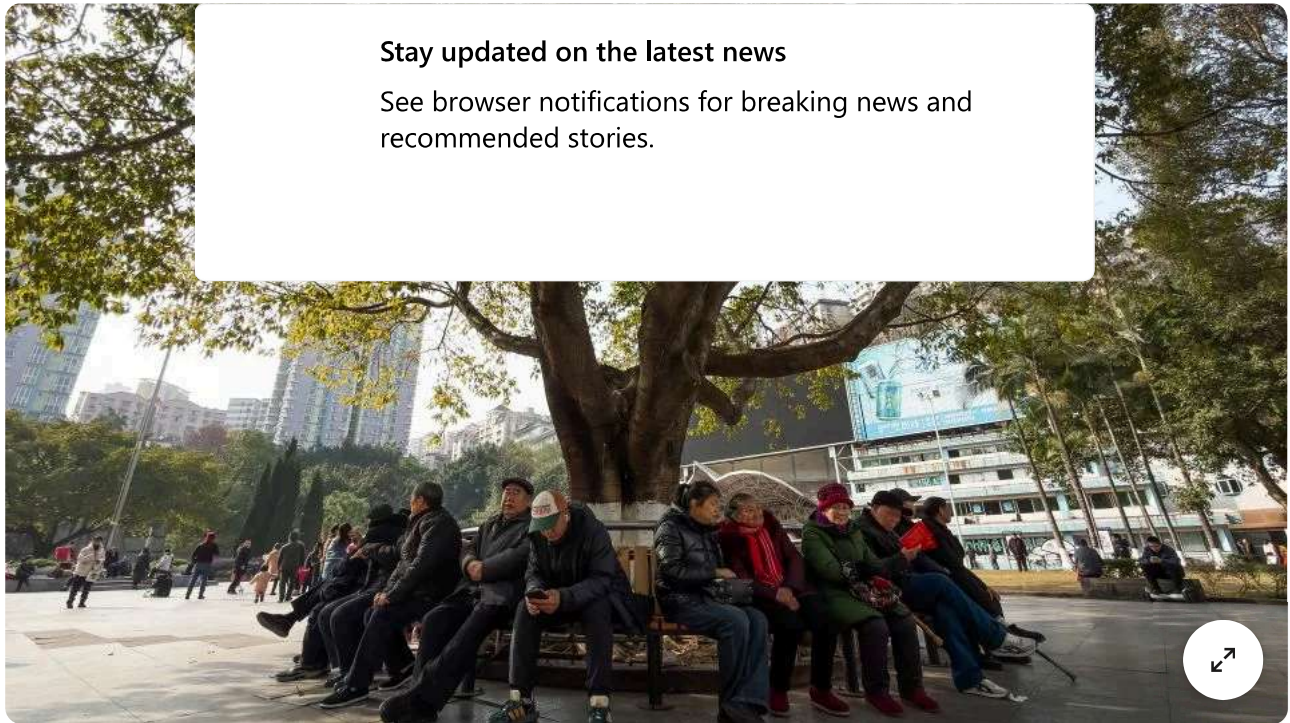
Part of this may be demographic: an aging society has a bigger pool of older people, so it'll have more older divorces too. Young people are getting married less these days, so their divorces are also fewer.

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But legal reforms have also made a huge difference, creating safety nets for women who previously had to depend on their husbands' livelihoods.

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Elderly people sit on a circular bench surrounding a large tree in a public square, in Chongqing, China, on January 27, 2026. - Cheng Xin/Getty Images

For instance, South Korea [ruled in 2014](#) that future pensions and severance pay could be included in the [division of assets](#). That means if a housewife handled all the housework and childcare during their marriage, thus allowing her husband to work, she's entitled to part of his elderly pension after getting divorced. Japan introduced a [similar reform in 2007](#).

These measures are especially critical given the high rate of elderly poverty in Asia. Among [OECD nations](#), South Korea has the highest poverty rate for people over 65; Hong Kong (not an OECD member) is similarly high. While Japan ranks slightly lower, it's still above the global average.

And [deep gender inequality still persists](#), despite these reforms.

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"For women in particular, the main reason they can't get a divorce is the inability to be financially independent," said Toyama, pointing to lower wages for women in Japan. "Once a woman becomes a full-time homemaker, it's very hard to leave her husband and become independent."

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"Having an extra 20, 30 years creates new expectations," with people more "willing to walk away from an unhappy, unfulfilled marriage," he said. Divorce "is not a failure anymore – rather, it's something new. It's the beginning of a new chapter."

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Iman Lau, 50, experienced this rebirth firsthand. Growing up in Hong Kong, her expectations for marriage were less than inspiring: spouses eat together, do activities together, and share blandly peaceful lives, she thought. "This is just how marriage is."

That mentality stayed even through years of infidelity by her husband. She would wonder: had she done something wrong, was she not good enough? He was ultimately the one to initiate the divorce despite her pleas to stay together; he even compared her to a bird who refused to fly out of an open cage.



Iman Lau, 50, poses for a picture at her apartment in Hong Kong. - Noemi Cassanelli/CNN

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She vowed to change that this year after finalizing the divorce, and threw herself into the world with determined vigor. She joined online meetup groups and made new friends. She discovered a love for the outdoors, going hiking, swimming, kayaking and snorkeling. She's learning to play the piano and loves jazz.

After traveling across Europe, she printed and hung up holiday photos in her apartment; it's her "happy wall," to remind her of the joy she found trekking across Sicily and camping in Georgia.

"I didn't know that life by yourself could be so spectacular," she said.

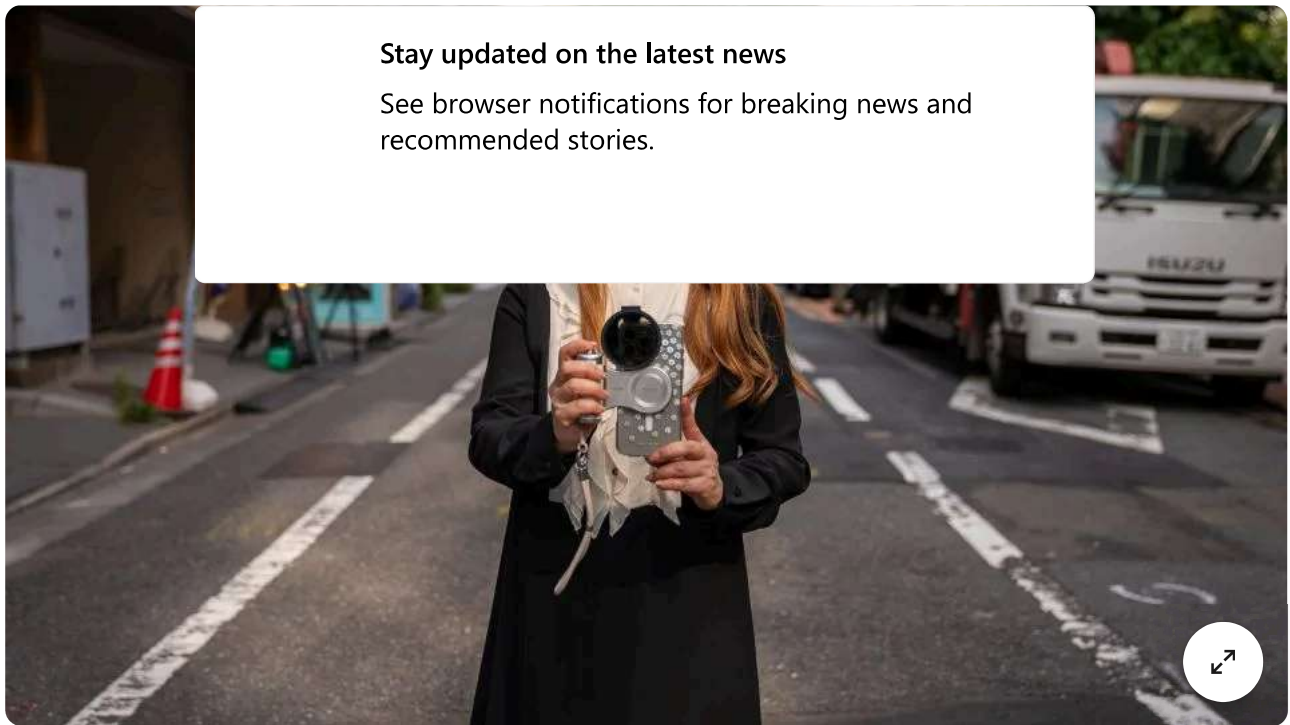
Toyama has embarked on a similar journey, describing herself as "full of life" at 63.

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She began livestreaming on TikTok, and created an account on a messaging app to dole out advice to people who call and text each week. She's working to launch new business ventures including a marriage agency and a live events company.

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After her divorce, Eiko Toyama began livestreaming on TikTok. - Yumi Asada/CNN

"For 32 years, I couldn't do anything, but now I'm finally in my third year of being able to do whatever I want," she said. The process wasn't easy, but any challenges now are still "much better than the anxiety of being with my ex-husband," she said. "Above all, there is freedom."

Both women described noticing an evolution in people's attitudes when they shared news of their divorce. For Toyama, the reactions were overwhelmingly positive, with some even expressing envy. For Lau, they were more split – and in revealing ways.

"Friends around my age treat it like a taboo, like you've had a death in the family – they don't dare to ask about it, they'll just say, 'I'm so sorry,'" she said. "But with young Gen Z people, everybody congratulates me."

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The increase in gray divorces might start to plateau when millennials – who got married under very different circumstances and social attitudes than their predecessors – start aging into retirement, said Park. But that's not for another decade or so, and separations will likely continue rising until then.

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the chance to see that you can have an even more vibrant life – as long as you're willing to take that step."

CNN's Shuai Zhang and Mirai Katagiri contributed to this report.

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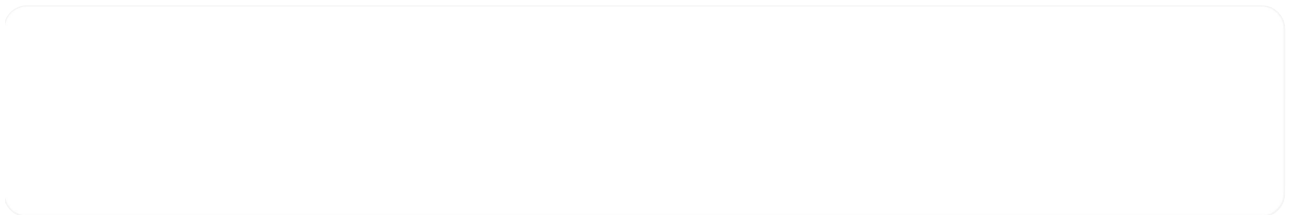
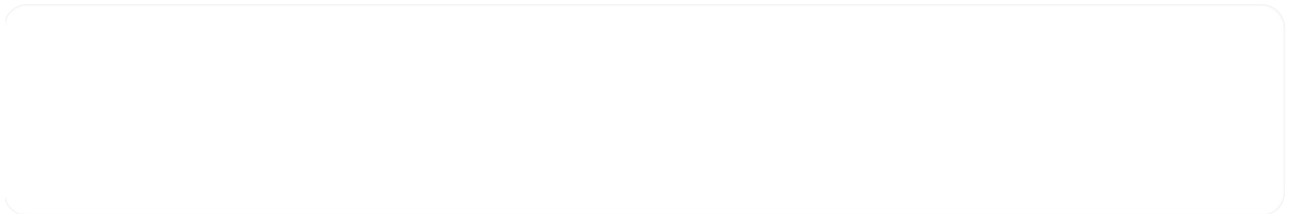
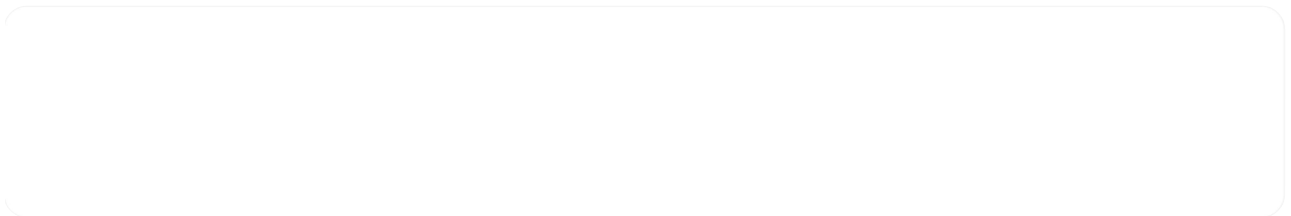
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