

ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Annual Report
FY 2023

Commissioners

Ogor Okoye, Chair (Saugus); Sandy Almonte, Vice Chair (Methuen); Geetha Rao Ramani, Secretary (Andover); Brianna Sullivan, Treasurer (Newburyport); Katrina Jagroop-Gomes, Operations Coordinator (Haverhill); Nicole McClain, Social Media Coordinator (Lynn); Sara Stanley, Social Media Coordinator (Rowley); Amy Smith, Commissioner (Lynn); Sefatia Romero Theken, Commissioner (Gloucester); and Chelsea Kamuene, Commissioner (North Andover)

Mission

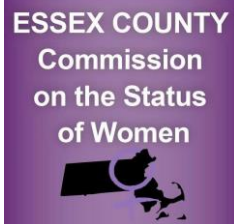
On August 3, 2010, former Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation establishing the Essex County Commission on the Status of Women (ECCSW) to advance the women of Essex County to full equality in all areas of life and to promote women's rights and responsibilities. The Essex County Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 2010 with a mission to study, review and report on the status of women in Essex County, and to provide a permanent, effective voice to advance the status of these women to full equality of all areas of life.

The goal of ECCSW is to uplift the voices of diverse women of Essex County and advocate for the health, safety, well-being, and economic advancement of women through community outreach, legislative advocacy, community hearings, and community education. We value equity, inclusion, and the leadership of women in all areas that impact their lives.

Advocacy

In spring 2021, the ECCSW conducted a survey of women in Essex County regarding the issues they are most concerned about, which we have since used to guide our programming and advocacy. The top areas of concern were child care, housing, and equal pay/fair wages. In light of that data, we voted to make the following bills our priority legislation for FY22 and FY23:

1. The Common Start Bill (HD1960/S.1307) (universal early childcare)
2. Act Requiring One Fair Wage (S.1082/H.1617)
3. I AM Bill (An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools (HD651)
4. An Act relative to Work and Family Mobility (H.3012/S.206)
5. An Act Supporting Working Parents Who Choose to Run for Public Office (S.408/H.639)
6. Parity on Public Boards (HD2082)



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In support of these priority bills, the Commissioners promoted these priorities on social media. Of these six priorities, one bill advanced and was passed into law the summer of 2022 and upheld by Massachusetts voters in November 2022. This law, which allows for the provision of drivers' licenses to all residents regardless of immigration status, will go into effect on July 1, 2023. Looking ahead, we will continue to advocate for the remaining priorities in the new Legislative body.

Public Engagement

We have continued to run our monthly public meetings virtually through Zoom and simultaneously through Facebook Live, so that public participants have the opportunity to engage with us to share their views. We have occasionally had members of the public join us in these meetings. In addition, we have invited groups serving women in Essex County to share their mission and the needs they have identified in our county, for example, Healing Abuse Working for Change (HAWC). We also continue to work on our initiative to connect with additional groups working in Essex County to share our mission and our legislative priorities to solicit their views..

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2023:

The Ginsburg Initiative

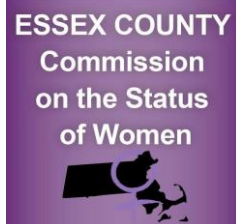
During the fall 2022, ECCSW, through their first ever (paid) intern, launched its Ginsburg Initiative, a young women's council, created to give voice to young women in Essex County. We recruited 10 young women between the ages of 14 and 21, representing diverse municipalities across Essex County to meet monthly. They identified their core topic for this year - mental health support - and are working on a survey on what young women feel are the best ways to seek support for mental health challenges in their daily lives. The initiative continues to further support the Commission in its work advocating for legislative priorities to improve the lives of women and girls within Essex County.

Women's Health Advocacy

On women's health policy, in the wake of the Supreme Court reversal of Roe vs Wade, we held an information session to discuss the Commonwealth's response - both in providing clear, unfettered access to women's reproductive services and protection to any medical professionals who provided women's health services.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Know Your Rights

Sara Stanley, ECCSW Commissioner and Executive Director of HAWC, and Julie Bakoian, HAWC Manager of Legal Services, shared steps that victims of domestic abuse can take to receive aid when exiting an abusive relationship.



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Listening Circle in Lynn, MA

In coordination with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status on Women (MSCW), ECCSW supported MSCW's January 19th public hearing in Lynn, MA to hear from Essex County residents. Around 50+ participants joined this event in person at the Northern Essex Community College to share their pressing concerns from affordable childcare services so single mothers can go to work, on how to get help after sexual assaults and domestic violence to the need for affordable housing. These periodic events give us additional insights into what is most needed in Essex County.

International Women's Day Breakfast

ECCSW was one of the hosts for the 25th International Women's Day Annual celebration on March 8th to bring women together to celebrate historic accomplishments, including having the first female Asian American mayor elected in Boston, Michelle Wu. This event was held at Simmons College.

Goals for the next fiscal year

Goal 1. Continue strengthening and expanding our Ginsburg Initiative. As the Ginsburg Initiative closes out its first year, the ECCSW is currently working to transition the initiative into its second year during the Summer of 2023. We are in the process of hiring a new intern and determining which Ginsburg fellows will continue into the second year. The Ginsburg Initiative also launched a survey around their theme, mental health support at the youth level, which will gather valuable data from the young female diaspora in Essex County on how to finetune behavioral health services that youth seek.

Goal 2. Continue building community connections. We have been working on connecting with groups who serve the needs of women in Essex County. Our objectives include learning more about the needs of women in the community, sharing our mission and our legislative priorities and building support and coalitions.

Goal 3. Work ahead to build a pipeline of activities to deliver more information on services and organizations in and around Essex County to the women and young girls and key legislative priorities consistent with the primary needs in the county. This requires improving our internal data management as well as creative thinking on how to build effective programming.

Submitted by Brianna Sullivan on May 24, 2023