



Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

ANNUAL REPORT

May 2023

Members:

Tara Marshall - Agawam
Jacqueline Velez - Springfield
Daisy Pereria-Tosado - Agawam
Shanique Spalding—Springfield
Nicole Coakley - Springfield

Elected Officers:

Jaqueline Velez—Chair
Shanique Spalding—Vice Chair
Tara Marshall —Secretary

Purpose

On April 25, 2017, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women inaugurated nine new commissioners to a newly formed regional commission created to study and report on the status of women and girls in the twenty-three towns and cities that make up Hampden County, Western Massachusetts. “The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is a state-established body charged with reviewing the status of women in Massachusetts and offering recommendations regarding policy that would improve access to opportunities and equality.” Taking from the brief provided, the Regional Commissions: “Modeled after the MCSW, the...unfunded county and regional women’s commissions were legislatively created to study and report on the status of women and girls in their geographical areas, and to provide permanent and effective voices for women and girls. Each county and regional commission reports their findings annually to MCSW.”

Membership

At the June 14, 2018 meeting, the HCCSWG voted for three (3) elected officers at which time the following assignments were accepted - Dawn Forbes DiStefano, Chair; Shanique Spalding, Vice Chair; Michelle Goncalves, Secretary. In January 2019, the Commission inaugurated three new officers including; Gabrielle Jackson; Tara Marshall and Lizzy Ortiz. In June 2020, the Commission elected new leadership, including Gabrielle Jackson as Chair and Tara Marshall as Secretary. In January 2021, the Commission welcomed their newest sister Commissioner Jacqueline Velez of Springfield. Most recently in 2022, the Commission accepted four new Commissioners, Nicole Coakley of Springfield, Kimberley Lee of Wilbraham, Daisy Perira-Tosada of Agawam and Alina Carcea of Longmeadow.

Accomplishments

The HCCSWG Commission has successfully completed a few meaningful list of accomplishments between

May 2022 to May 2023. Although our year saw the end of COVID restrictions our Commission struggled this year with membership participation. Despite our struggling membership numbers, we managed to have some really meaningful meetings, events, and participation. Some accomplishment of note in 2022 is our December meeting 2022 highlighting guest speaker Carmen Nieves the Executive Director of Alianza. Carmen shared more about the Domestic Violence work Alianza in Holyoke, MA has taken on and gave an update on survivors in the district. Commissioners engaged in lively conversation on how to support survivors in the county and about how best to support Alianza. This was a key guest speaker as Alianza is a fairly new Domestic Violence Service organization in the area of our district but has a forty-year history of great work. At the start of the new year, our Commission began planning our annual Women's History Month event. The 2023 Theme was " Women Who Tell Our Stories," following the global theme. This was once again a virtual event that highlighted five incredible women of color in our district. Guest speakers in April May Mundford a reporter with our local paper, The Republican, Stephanie Marrero-Wilson a social worker and children's book author, Dr. Khadija Tuitt is a Certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and the CEO of In-Tuitt Behavioral Health Services, Zaida Govan a ward Council Woman for the city of Springfield and lastly guest Poet Laureate and speaker Magdalena Gómez. This was by far our most moving panel, with each panelist sharing incredible personal stories and how those stories shaped who they are to inspire others. We had over thirty participants at this event and received the most feedback from audience members and participants. From this event, we were able to get four new applicants to our Commission. Another highlight this year was our April participation in GELI conference this year. It was our pleasure to help plan for this event, coordinate with the state commission transportation in Western MA, and have our Vice Chair Shanique Spalding do a Civics presentation with the young women of the conference. We are hoping to have an active role next year and work months ahead to help with a greater Western MA turnout. But with our successes, we faced in March the resignation of our newest members and existing members of tenure, which really slowed our progress and dwindled our numbers to only four active Commissioners. We are leaning in this late spring into summer on interviewing and onboarding four new commissioners and finishing the summer with two large events for the community while also shaping our advocacy for legislative bills this session of interest to our district. We are also launching this Spring-Summer our first internship program. This year into 2025, our Commission will be working on pushing the following bills: The I AM Bill, The I AM Bill, Voter Access Bill, Child Care Bill, Prison Moratorium Bill, and Rent Stabilization Bill. We look forward to the many opportunities in the future to support, provide resources and push for legislation about important issues that impact women and girls in Hampden County and beyond.

Community Events

Domestic Violence Guest Speaker Updates (2022)

Women Who Tell Our Stories (March 2023)

GELI Conference (April 2023)

Legislative Breakfast (June 2023)

Regional Hearing (June 2023)

HCCSWG Commissioners also invited a series of women who lead in our community to serve as featured guests and present important information to our constituents during our monthly Public Meetings on a quarterly basis.

HCCSWG Grant Request from the State Commission

The HCCSWG submitted a request for grant funding from the MA Commission in January 2023. We used some of those funds to compensate for our guest speakers at our Women's History Month event. The remainder of the funds will be used in June for two events we have hosted in the past but paused due to the pandemic. They are a Legislative Breakfast for our Hampden County delegation to get to know the Commission and Commissioners, as well as a Hampden County Hearing to hear from our women and girls in the region to plan future events and advocacy. With COVID regulations lifted and hybrid model meetings extended until 2025 we anticipate the turnout for these vents to be equal or more to that of our Women's History Month event.

Conclusion

The Hampden County Commission is quite proud of our work during the past year despite our membership challenges, we have worked diligently to engage with our community, participate in local initiatives, coordinate opportunities to connect and work with State Commission for public hearings and collect information to guide our efforts. We plan to build on our successful events earlier this year and grow our Commission's membership back with new faces from new communities in our county. We look forward to the new ideas and new energy additional Commissioners bring and learning from the June events we have planned with Legislators and Community.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jacqueline Velez

Chair

The Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls