



Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report 2024

Commissioners

Shela Levante, Chair (Pittsfield), Sarah Gillooly, Vice Chair (Pittsfield), Halli Stewart, Secretary (Pittsfield), Dawn Brooks (City), Laura Cabrera (Pittsfield), Carly Garofano (Pittsfield), Marissa Dubecky Meehan (Richmond), Rhonda Serre (City), Andrea Wadsworth (Lee)

Mission

The Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women represents all cities and towns in Berkshire County including Adams, Alford, Becket, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Dalton, Egremont, Florida, Great Barrington, Hancock, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, Mount Washington, New Ashford, New Marlborough, North Adams, Otis, Peru, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, Williamstown, and Windsor.

Advocacy

The Commission identified the Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion (H.3084/S.1990) as its most important priority given that new population increased in the County can be attributed to the estimated 10,000 immigrants calling the region home, contributing to the regions job creation and economic growth. To learn more about this issue, and others, BCCSW held a Delegate Meet and Greet event on January 8, 2024. During this meeting, Commissioners learned how the state is advocating for language inclusion & cultural humility. One example of progress is the RMV and how it is now providing and instruction on navigating its website in 15 different languages.

This year, the Commission also learned about the Healthy Youth Act, (SD. 2199, HD. 3874), a bill that would improve sex and relationship education in Massachusetts public schools. Members of the Commission attended a Letter-to-the-Editor (LTE) Workshop, which was co-sponsored by Planned Parenthood and the MCSW. In March, the Commission invited Berkshire Pride, an organization whose mission is to provide safe



spaces and events where LGBTQIA+ community members can live and thrive as their authentic selves, as the nonprofit partner. During this meeting, Commissioners learned about Safe Zone training, which is an LGBTQIA+ competency training and certification, and the grand opening of the first LGBTQIA+ Hub in the Berkshires.

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2024: Educational Partnerships and Planning a Retreat.

Educational Partnerships: Beginning in January 2024, the BCCSW conducted a series of conversations with community partners during public meetings throughout the year to learn more about initiatives that advance the needs of women and girls in Berkshire County. Partnership included: Berkshire Pride and the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts. These conversations are key to not only understanding the challenges and opportunities women and girl serving organizations face and are seeing in their constituencies, but also serve as a useful tool to build relationships.

Retreat Planning: Three new commissioners were appointed in December 2023, and in January 2024, the BCCSW had a leadership change. This provided a timely opportunity for the Commission to come together and plan a retreat that will focus on the 2025 strategic plan, updating regional priorities, program planning for the coming year, and developing plan for having an online presence to raise visibility of the Commission.

Goals for the next fiscal year

Host a second legislative event. Provide an opportunity for Commissioners to meet and interact with our delegates, giving all an opportunity to become acquainted with current issues and concerns, and learning more about state priorities.

Continue to invite community partners to meetings. Continuing with and expanding upon the goal of inviting community partners to meetings will foster great community listening opportunities with the intention of looking for ways to collaborate on opportunities that serve women and girls in Berkshire County.

Re-establish an online presence. To expand awareness of the Commission, we'll begin establishing a social media presence to share information and resources with our communities.



Submitted by Shela Levante, Chair on May 20, 2024.