

ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Annual Report
FY 2024

Commissioners

July - December 2023:

Brianna Sullivan, Chair (Newburyport)
Kirsten Alexander, Vice Chair (Wenham)
Geetha Rao Ramani, Treasurer (Andover)
Chelsea Kamuene, Secretary (North Andover)
Ogor Okoye (Saugus)
Nicole McClain (Lynn)
Sara Stanley (Rowley)
Amy Smith (Lynn)
Sefatia Romeo Theken, (Gloucester); and

In December of 2023 Commissioners Romeo Theken completed her final term, while Commissioners Kamuene and Okoye resigned due to competing time demands.

January - May 2024:

In January 2024 we welcomed Commissioners Brenda Pena (Lynn), Helen McDermott (Beverly) and Maeva Veillard (Methuen). Commissioner Stanley volunteered to take over the position of Secretary vacated by Commissioner Kamuene

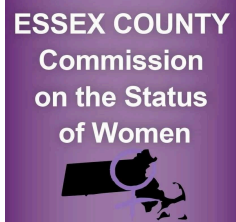
As of May 10, 2024, Commissioner McClain has resigned due to competing time demands. Her term would have ended in December 2024, so there is presently a vacancy on the Commission.

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. ECCSW 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



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In FY24 the ECCSW continued to lift up issues related to child care, housing, and equal pay/fair wages as the most pressing for women and girls. Our priority bills are as follows:

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. Parity on Public Boards (HD2082)
5. An Act Supporting Working Parents Who Choose to Run for Public Office (S.408/H.639)

Outreach was made to all Essex County Legislators in March 2024 to inform them of our priorities and encourage their support for these bills. Finally, in support of these priority bills, the Commissioners promoted these priorities on social media and in the monthly public meetings. We have also worked on outreach to coalition partners, including the Common Start Coalition. In addition, Commissioner Sullivan submitted written testimony on behalf of the ECCSW in support of Parents Running for Office and the I AM Bills, and will be speaking at the MCSW Legislative Briefing on the Parent Running for Office bill.

Public Engagement

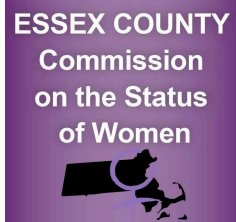
We have continued to run our monthly public meetings virtually through Zoom and, when technology cooperates, simultaneously through Facebook Live, so that public participants have the opportunity to engage with us to share their views. We have occasionally had members of the public join us in these meetings. In addition, we have invited groups serving women in Essex County to share their mission and the needs they have identified in our county. 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 2024:

Young Women

- In October 2023 ECCSW hosted Anissa Essaibi George, President & CEO, and Abeer Abu-Rubieh, Executive Program Manager representatives from the Big Sister Association of MA, with the goal of increasing awareness about the benefits of and opportunities to mentor young girls.
- ECCSW continued our programming for young women through the **Ginsburg Initiative**, our regional youth council, created to give voice to young women in Essex County. Led by intern Sierra Dearnis in its second year, our participants, ages 14 - 21, represent diverse



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municipalities across Essex County. They continued working on last year's theme - mental health support for youth - and are working on presenting the results of a survey on this topic to school administrators. 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

- In April 2024, Commissioner Veillard hosted a discussion for Black Maternal Health Week (4/11-4/17/24). Commissioner Veillard gave a detailed presentation on the data regarding troubling health disparities among women of color compared to white women. She also shared initiatives underway to try to combat these inequities.

Listening Circle in Haverhill, MA

- In October 2023, ECCSW hosted a hybrid listening circle at the UMAss Lowell iHub in Haverhill. Participants shared the desire for more and improved opportunities to collaborate and share resources, wisdom and experience.

Women's History

- On March 20, 2024 Commissioners Sara Stanley and Nicole McClain were featured in the Leading Ladies event, "HerStory: How Far Have We Come?" This community conversation hosted at the historic Cabot Theater in Beverly discussed recent accomplishments, current threats to women's rights, and ways to get involved in women's advocacy. It was also a great way to promote ECCSW to women-focused members of the North Shore. We were also able to use new marketing materials at a pre-event tabling opportunity, and also directed visitors to the new website using the QR code developed by MCSW.

Affordable Housing

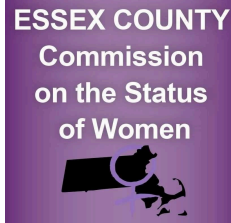
- In May 2024 ECCSW hosted Ian Burns, Community & Economic Development Program Coordinator, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission for a discussion on the MBTA Communities Act and the important role this law plays in removing zoning barriers in communities to enable more multifamily mixed use developments in close proximity to public transportation services to encourage more liveable, walkable communities.

Childcare

- In March 2024 ECCSW hosted members of the Common Start Coalition to learn more about how we can advocate in favor of the bill. They shared feedback from stakeholders and legislators and issues that still pose obstacles to passage of the bill.

Civic Engagement

- In November 2023, ECCSW hosted Megan Sweeney, Founder and Executive Director of PowerUP!, a grassroots community group in Marblehead, dedicated to increasing civic



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engagement. Ms. Sweeny's presentation prompted an engaging conversation about ways ECCSW can be more involved in non-partisan community engagement.

Goals for the next fiscal year

Goal 1. Continue strengthening and expanding our Ginsburg Initiative. As the Ginsburg Initiative closes out its second year, the ECCSW is currently working to transition the initiative into its third cycle, which follows the academic school year. We are beginning steps to recruit our next intern and determining which Ginsburg fellows will continue into this coming school year. We also plan to build a more robust mentoring program between Commissioners and Ginsberg members and encourage the young women to join in legislative advocacy and outreach, helping them build confidence and leadership skills and build their networks.

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. We have been continuously developing a database of community organizations, particularly women-focused groups that we can either invite to our meetings or ask to be invited to meetings of those groups, either to simply network or to make formal presentations about the work of the ECCSW. To further work towards this goal, we created an Outreach Committee in January 2024, made up of three Commissioners, who work on this goal and report back to the full Commission.

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, and, in conjunction with Goal #2, find other groups to collaborate with rather than simply doing all events on our own. We created a Programming & Planning Committee in January 2024, made up of three Commissioners, who work on this goal and report back to the full Commission.

Goal 4. More focused outreach to elected officials. We also created a Legislative Advocacy Committee in January 2024 and tasked it with ensuring more frequent liaising with state elected officials from Essex County, and to also thinking about ways to reach local elected officials.

Goal 5: Revise our bylaws to reflect current and best practices. We created an ad hoc Bylaws Committee, who have reviewed the bylaws and submitted proposed amendments. We will be voting on those changes soon.

Submitted by Brianna Sullivan on May 20, 2024