



MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report 2023

Commissioners

Lisa MacDonald, Chair (Natick); Julie Faqir, Vice Chair (Holliston); Michele Fronk Schuckel, Secretary (Weston); Nasiba Mannan, Communications (Hopkinton); Heather Panahi, Athena Council advisor (Wellesley); Amir Rotondi, Athena Council advisor (Medway); Odessa Sanchez, Regional Commissioner (Wellesley); Stephanie Deeley, Regional Commissioner, (Framingham)

Outgoing Members

Jean Bertschmann (December 2022)

Resigned during Fiscal Year 2023

Lindsay Galvao
Rachel Niemiec
Leslie Smart

Athena Council Members

Mia Remington	Julie Karam	Ashwina Bangari
Anjali Batra	Zoe Maggioni	Tomohiro Oga
Riddhi Paithankar	V Ramaswamy	Sissy Wang

Mission

The purpose of this MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women (herein “MWCSW”) shall be to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote the rights and opportunities for all women. The mission of the MetroWest Commission is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women in MetroWest communities, described by Chapter 335 of the Acts of 2014 as including the towns of Ashland, Bellingham, Dover, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Norwood, Sherborn, Southborough, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Wayland, Wellesley,



Westborough, Weston and Wrentham and the city of Marlborough. The MetroWest Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

Our goal as a Commission, beyond our mission statement as defined above and stated in our by-laws, is to strengthen our ability to advocate on behalf of MetroWest women. We seek to do this by listening, learning, and informing ourselves about the issues that matter to the majority of women in our region, determine effective outreach strategies and developing a robust list of stakeholders. These efforts are intended to improve our ability to play a role in the support and advancement of women and the promotion of their rights and opportunities.

Advocacy

As demonstrated through our ongoing outreach, programming, and legislative priorities, MWCSW prioritized the following issues:

- a) Mental health of girls living in MetroWest, b) Menstrual Equity, and c) Intimate Partner, Dating, and Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention.

Our commitment to each of these issues is continuously demonstrated through our outreach, programming, and partnerships with MetroWest agencies, organizations, and state legislators whose focus centers on one or more of these issues. Specifically, over the course of this year we have strengthened our partnership with Voices Against Violence, Out MetroWest, and the MetroWest Women's Fund. The MW Women's Fund met with us to share their results on a mental health survey administered to adolescent girls in MetroWest and discussed our goals in future programming, including the work of our Athena Council, as it pertained to these results. In addition, we have created a new partnership with the Coalition for Body Autonomy in Framingham and will seek to collaborate with them in one of our main goals for next year.

On May 8, 2023, MWCSW attended Senate President Karen Spilka's webinar event titled, Mental Health Essentials for Parents and Caregivers. The event featured mental health professionals who provided resources and strategies on how to identify, seek help, and treatment options for individuals experiencing mental health concerns.

The following outlines the MWCSW legislative priorities in support of proposed state legislation:

Menstrual Equity	An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (known as "I AM BILL")	Sponsors: Jay D. Livingstone , Christine P. Barber, Patricia Jehlen	H.534
Mental Health	An act requiring a mental health Wellness exam for all school children	Sponsors: Priscilla Sousa	H.585
Womens' Incarceration	An Act establishing a jail and prison construction moratorium	Sponsors: Chynah Tyler	H.1795

Programming

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

Purple Passion Walk

On September 17, 2022, MWCSW participated in the annual Purple Passion Walk, hosted by Voices Against Violence in Framingham. Voices Against Violence is a sexual assault and domestic violence support organization and caters to a majority of communities MWCSW represents. Each year the event highlights the need to combat sexual violence and allows our regional commissioners to represent our organization as well as network with others in the region whom are committed to raising awareness and combating sexual violence, including but not limited to domestic violence. The walk is scheduled again for September 23, 2023, with our Commissioners and Athena Council planning to take an active role in this year’s event.

Redefining Feminism

On Saturday, February 25, 2023, our Athena Council hosted a virtual event called, Redefining Feminism, featuring three local panelists from nearby schools and colleges. The discussion focused on trends and challenges as it pertains to the notion of feminism, its stereotypes, and redefining what it means in today’s society. We were pleased to welcome more than 30 guests in attendance for the event, which included



staff from Senate President Karen's Spilka's office, Rep. Robyn Kennedy, and Rep. Priscilla Sousa.

Who Care's? Assessing the State of Caregiving in MetroWest and Greater Boston.

On March 29 at 630pm at Holliston Town Hall, more than 20 people attended an in-person event focused on the various supports, resources, and proposed ideas for intergenerational care in Massachusetts. Senate President Karen Spilka was our featured speaker discussing the state of care in Massachusetts and outlined intergenerational care. In addition, Jessica Constantino, director of Advocacy for AARP Massachusetts discussed elder care and supports for caregivers was also a speaker and discussed resources and statistics as it pertains to elders and their caretakers. State legislators Rep. Jack Lewis and Rep. James Arena DeRosa were in attendance along with several State Commissioners. Our Regional Commission is interested in continuing to support this topic and continue to support the notion of intergenerational care.

Youth Advisory Council Day

On April 26, 2023, our Athena Council was invited to participate in Senate President Karen Spilka's Youth Advisory Council Day. All nine Athena Council members were in attendance and represented themselves and MWCSW, providing a presentation on their priorities and work to date. Specifically, the Athena Council's presentation provided an overview of their past work including their survey on mental health, a recap of the February 25 Redefining Feminism program, statistics resulting from the questions and answers portion of the Redefining Feminism discussion, their commitment to menstrual equity, with a particular focus on the I AM Bill, and an overview of Denim Day, which happened to be occurring on the same day as the visit to the Senate President Spilka's office. Overall Athena Council did a remarkable job demonstrating their work around all of our collective priorities. We will continue to work in tandem with Athena Council and provide every support we can for their efforts. Athena Council will also share these highlights at Advocacy Day on May 31.

Goals for the next fiscal year

Creating and maintaining partnerships with increased visibility

Since the start of 2023, the main goal of the MWCSW for this year and next year is going to be creating and maintaining new and existing partnerships. At this point, the MWCSW has done a great job hosting events and defining our priorities, with a



particular emphasis on establishing our Athena Council. As we look to what's next and how we can best strengthen our regional commission, its important that we build more bridges and collaborate with local agencies and organizations. The work currently being done is hosting guests from various organizations at our monthly meetings as well as our Chair meeting one on one to promote what our region does and how we can best partner. In addition, we have discussed that its important we increase visibility in and around MetroWest, both in-person and virtually through our social media. It is important we take more steps in terms of marketing and advertising and will do this through a variety of measures (i.e. website, fliers, business cards, promotional materials, hosting tables at various events with our banner, etc.). We look forward to providing more information and assessing this initiative in the coming months.

Review of Processes and Procedures

As our Athena Council enters its fifth year since inception, we want to ensure that the council and the practices within it are sustainable for both its members and commission. Over the course of the past year, our members have completed a tool kit binder so that future members do not need to "reinvent the wheel." Furthermore, it is our goal to develop an "Athena Council internship" and hire an intern to work with the girls and continue the great work being done. We are planning to hire one of our current Athena Council members to take on the intern role. The work of Athena Council is making an impact on MetroWest and beyond. It is our sincere hope and of utmost importance to continue to grow this program in the coming years. Finally, we are also going to be reviewing all by-laws and documentation to date to ensure that our practices align with our written procedures, including a full review of by-laws, mission statement, and elected positions within the regional commission.

Submitted by Lisa MacDonald on May 22, 2023