



## Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

### Annual Report May 2024

#### Commissioners

Elisabeth Arruda, Chair (Marion); Michelle Davidson, Vice Chair of Publicity (Hanover); Lisa Westgate, Vice-Chair of Program and Planning (Marshfield); Maude Gorman (Hingham); Jacqueline Jones (Brockton); Danielle Kempe (Marshfield); Carolyn M. Riley (Plymouth)

Commissioners Phyllis Ellis, Donna Pursel, Janine Suchecki and Tracey Wheedon resigned.

#### Mission

The Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (“PCCSW”) was established by House Bill 1110, signed into law on March 15, 2018 as Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2018. The PCCSW’s mission is to provide a permanent, effective voice for the advancement of women and girls in Plymouth County.

The PCCSW is a nine-member body which represents all the towns and cities in Plymouth County including: Abington, Bridgewater, Brockton, Carver, Duxbury, East Bridgewater, Halifax, Hanover, Hanson, Hingham, Hull, Kingston, Lakeville, Marion, Marshfield, Mattapoisett, Middleborough, Norwell, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Rochester, Rockland, Scituate, Wareham, West Bridgewater, and Whitman.

The PCCSW is responsible for studying, reviewing and reporting on the status of women and girls in Plymouth County, and is charged with offering recommendations regarding policy that would improve access to opportunities and equality for women and girls in the region.

Through public hearings, public meetings, and coordination with resources within and residents of Plymouth County, the PCCSW will assess, take actions, and make recommendations to advance the women and girls of Plymouth County toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women and girls.

#### Advocacy



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The PCCSW maintained the following legislation as our priorities for the '23/'24 legislative cycle.

1. **An Act relative to birthing justice in the Commonwealth (S. 1415)** Lead Sponsors: Sen Miranda
2. **An Act Supporting Parents Running for Public Office (S. 348/H. 590)** Lead Sponsors: Sen. Patricia Jehlen and Reps. Mike Connolly and Joan Meschino
3. **An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (IAM Bill) (S. 1381/H. 534)** Lead Sponsors: Rep Jay D. Livingstone, Rep Christine P. Barber & Sen Jehlen

### Programming

The Plymouth County Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2023-2024: an October listening session in Plymouth, a January Commissioner Strategic Planning session and a March Women's History Month event on domestic violence.

*Program A:* Listening Session October 18, 2023, at the Plymouth Center for Active Living. We hosted an informal gathering to listen to the concerns of women in Plymouth county. As there were issues with outreach, the session had few in attendance. Those who attended shared their concerns with PFAS in the water, English language training, vocational training and the MA state of emergency with migration.

*Program B:* Strategic Planning Retreat. January 29, 2024, Alden Park restaurant in Plymouth. Attendees: Former PCCSW Chair Karis North (emerita), State Representative Joan Meschino, former PCCSW Commissioner Laura Buckley, MCSW Regional Coordinator Tina Gaines, Commissioner Carolyn Riley, Commissioner Michelle Davidson, Commissioner Elisabeth Aruda, Commissioner Tracey Weeden. The group reflected on accomplishments and challenges of the PCCSW from 2018-Present. We discussed community partnerships, developing a girls council, and setting standards around emerita status. And we discussed potential priorities of financial security, domestic violence, housing, maternal health, collaboration with other commissions, and more.

*Program C:* Women's History Month Event, March 19, 2024. Marshfield Library. **Defining My Place: A Tribute to the Strength and Resilience of Women.** Lovern Gordon, president and founder of [Love Life Now Foundation Inc.](#) and author of the award-winning memoir *The Legacy He Left Me*, led a powerful conversation about domestic violence and how to advocate for and support survivors. The event was well-attended and widely considered a success by the



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commissioners. Commissioners Carolyn Riley, Elisabeth Arruda, Michelle Davidson, Jacqueline Jones, Lisa Westgate, and Donna Pursel were in attendance. We also had Karen Fabriizio from the South Shore Resources and Advocacy Center, and Tamara Dzialo from the Department of Transitional Services Domestic Violence Unit, in attendance. After the presentation by Lovern Gordon, we had an engaging and informative discussion about domestic violence in Plymouth County.

Important Notes/Context:

At that start of this fiscal year, we only had four commissioners, and we were not able to achieve many of our goals from the previous year. We have added new members, however, in the first half of 2024, we had four more commissioners resign. With such high turnover, we have had challenges filling our leadership positions and organizing events. At the time of this report, we have two open seats on the commission.

Despite these challenges, we elected new officers, updated our by-laws, hosted three events, and created three sub-committees: outreach/publicity, programming/planning, and policy/legislative.

Our vice chair of outreach/publicity, Commissioner Michelle Davidson, completed the project started the previous year for our website design. She also dramatically improved our social media outreach and created a LinkedIn page for the Commission.

Goals for the next fiscal year

*Goal 1.* Reach and maintain an active nine-body membership in our commission. We will need to continue our outreach, recruitment and retention efforts. This will require minimum funding, but it will require time to recruit, interview, and orient new members. We will know we have achieved our goal once we have nine commissioners and each is working on at least one of three sub-committees. We also have already taken steps to improve our outreach on social media and to order PCCSW information cards.

*Goal 2.* Update our legislative priorities for this upcoming legislative cycle and continue to develop relationships with our legislators. The sub-committee on policy will support these efforts. This will require time, but not funding. We will review the MCSW priorities, discuss our priorities, and organize events to gather testimony in support of these legislative priorities.



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*Goal 3.* Build and expand partnerships with local organizations and co-sponsor events. We plan on inviting community partners to our meetings with the hopes of developing relationships, co-sponsoring events and thus expanding outreach into the community. This builds on our work from previous years. This will require time and some funding to achieve. We will have met our goal for the year if we have developed at least two partnerships with organizations and co-hosted two events.

*Goal 3.* Gather testimony to support our legislative priorities. We plan on providing listening opportunities to each of our upcoming events. All three of the sub-committees will support these efforts. We will have met our goal if we can accomplish at least one listening session per grant funding cycle.

Submitted by Commissioner Elisabeth Arruda, Chair on May X, 2024.