



UPPER MIDDLESEX REGIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Annual Report
2022-2023

Commissioners

Connie Chow, Co-Chair (Newton); Corrinne Corso (Ayer); Jennifer Roecklein-Canfield (Littleton); Christina Li, Secretary (Lexington); Rebecca Neale (Bedford); Michelle Mullet Co-Chair (North Reading, term ended 3/2023); Kristina Racek-Pachulis (Melrose); Linda Rossetti (Winchester, term ended 12/2022); Anna Tse (Malden).

Mission

The mission of the Regional Commission is to uphold ideals and pursue actions consonant with the upward economic and social mobility of women and girls. We do so by gathering empirical evidence to mobilize and amplify the voices of women and girls; and generating transformational recommendations that create and sustain accountable systems that enable women and girls to thrive.

Advocacy

We prioritized support for the first two bills below in consideration of the overwhelming financial, mental and physical burden people who identify as women bear in care work. We continue to support early childcare, childcare workers, informed by a commissioner's engagement in the childcare services network. In response to our last year's town hall and the personal experiences of a majority of commissioners, we support the bill related to tax credits for middle and low income families who have to care for elder members of the family. Through the recommendation of our Athena (youth) council, we support the I AM Bill.

- 1) **Common Start: An Act Providing Affordable and Accessible High Quality Early Education and Care to Promote Child Development and Well-Being and Support the Economy in the Commonwealth (S.301/H.489)**. This bill promotes affordable, high-quality early education and child care for all Massachusetts families, which increases economic and social mobility for women.
- 2) **An Act to establish the family caregiver tax credit (S.764/ H.2932)** This bill allows any family member over the age of 18 who assists with activities of daily living to be eligible for caregiver benefits if they make less than \$75000 themselves or a combined \$150000 with their partner.
- 3) **An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (IAM Bill) (S. 1381/H. 534)** that would provide immediate, material benefit and restore dignity to menstruating individuals in all public institutions including schools and jails.

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2023: A, B, and C.

Establishment of the Athena (youth) Council. We recruited and inducted 6 younger women's advocates and activists in the Upper Middlesex region to the Athena Council. The goal of the group is to identify, discuss and amplify the issues that they believe are most important to teen girls in their own communities. Per the charge, this can include, but is not limited to, organizing public hearings, collaborating with community organizations, and conducting research and publishing reports on pertinent issues. In this inaugural year, Council members studied international feminist movements, and conducted research on menstrual equity, advocating for inclusion of this issue in the Commission's legislative priorities.

Survey on eldercare preparedness. To continue to inform ourselves on the commission's legislative priorities, to understand community-based actions already in place that address issues of concern, and to build relationships with the community and assess how the commission might leverage our role to advance their work, we invited Dr. Julie Norstrand, a practitioner and a member of the board of the Newton Council to our open meeting. We subsequently collaborated with Dr. Norstrand to modify and disseminate a survey on eldercare to better understand related needs. The results will be shared at our virtual townhall, and disseminated in the coming year.

Virtual Townhall. Eldercare: What to expect and what you need to know. An evening for learning and hearing. June 5, 6 - 7:30 pm

The event's panel will share personal testimony about the challenges of caring for aging family member; current legislation (including our priority bill S.764/ H.2932) addressing eldercare;

access to services; advocacy with employers to include eldercare as a workplace benefit; and aspects of elder law.

We have been engaged in research on compiling a regional guide on elder care and will share a version at the meeting.

Goals for the next fiscal year

Goal 1. How does it build on the work already being done? What steps are necessary to achieve it and what resources (time, money, space) will it require? How will you know when you have achieved it?

Goal 1. Enact a succession plan that also promotes civic participation. In addition to adding commissioners to return to a full council this year, we hope to create a vibrant, supportive circle of women and girls who can advise, practice advocacy, and continue to serve with us as commissioners and beyond.

- a) We aim to include at least 2 non-commission volunteer members on each committee, to expand our capacity, provide mentorship and to ensure continuity in programming. We will engage both former commissioners, those who have applied to be on the commission and individuals that commissioners have identified as potential replacements.
- b) We will continue to support the Athena Council and their work, including organizing a joint event.

Goal 2. Continue to expand our community and network in the region, with specific focus on elder care issues.

- a) We will continue our Legislative Action Speaker series in our full group meetings, and publicize them through our mailing list/ targeted invitations
- b) Co-host at least one additional educational / community engagement panel on eldercare, especially concerning those women of color, and/or LGBTQIA elders.
- c) Continue to collate and disseminate our eldercare resource guide that we began this year.

Goal 3. Revisit Equity Audit collaboration with UMass Boston.

We will pursue alternate areas of funding to support the Equity Audit as detailed in the 2021 annual report.

Submitted by Connie Chow on May 25, 2023