



UPPER MIDDLESEX REGIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Annual Report
2023-2024

Commissioners

Shannon Butler-Mokoro (Lowell, term began 1/2024); Connie Chow, Chair (Newton); Corrinne Corso (Ayer, term ended 4/2024); Diane Randolph Jones (Acton, term began 1/2024); Shreya Kesarwani (Lexington, term began 1/2024); Christina Li, Secretary (Cambridge); Kristina Racek Pechulis (Melrose, term ended 12/2023); Jennifer Roecklein-Canfield (Littleton); 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

Our advocacy focused on dignity in healthcare, and supporting caretakers. We became aware of the issue of nonconsensual intimate (pelvic, rectal and prostate) exams and worked on both programming and advocacy on this front (1). Through the recommendation of our Athena (youth) council, and in line with the state commission, we support the I AM Bill (2). We continued to support the bills to recognize the financial, mental and physical burden people who identify as women bear in care work. 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 (3). We continue to support early childcare, childcare workers, informed by a commissioner's engagement in the childcare services network (4).

1) We prioritized support for [S1333](#) and [H2146](#), *An Act prohibiting nonconsensual intimate examinations of anesthetized or unconscious*. It was reported favorably by the Public Health committee and referred to the committee on Health Care Financing in February as Bill H 4293. and As of April 18th, the Healthcare Financing Committee recommended the bill ought to pass and referred to the committee on House Ways and Means.

2) **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. The bill was reported favorably by committee, recommending it ought to pass with an amendment and referred to the committee on Senate Ways and Means and a new draft adopted in fall 2023. As of today, the bill had its second reading and is awaiting action in the Senate.

3) **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. As of May 9, 2024, this bill, H4634, is under study by the Health Care Financing committee.

4) **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. A new draft of the bill, [S2619](#), is currently in the Senate.

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2024.

A. Screening of *At Your Cervix*, a documentary about nonconsensual cervical exams, and and Panel on reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

The event was attended by over 60 people, with ~80 registrants. The event was co-sponsored by a broad coalition that will continue to work together in the new year.

- Eastern Regional Commission on the Status of Women
- *Center for Health Humanities*, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
- *Our Bodies Ourselves Today*, Suffolk University
- *Resilient Sisterhood Project*
- *Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies*, University of Massachusetts, Boston
- *Cedar Hill Pediatrics*
- *Pre-health liaison*, Simmons University (host)

Panelists include

- A'magine, sexuality educator, activist and *At Your Cervix* filmmaker
- Judy Norsigian, internationally renowned advocate and author for women's health and co-founder of Our Bodies Ourselves.
- Dr. Michele David, Chief of Quality and Safety at MIT Medical
- Dr. Amy Agigian, director of the Suffolk University Center for Women's Health and Human Rights will moderate.

B. Athena (Youth) Council, created last year. We work together in two subcommittees, a policy/nonprofit one and a hearing one. **Menstrual Product Drive:** the members of the Athena Council identified the issue of menstrual equity as an issue that they believe are most important to teen girls in their own communities. They are in the process of soliciting donations through their school events, secured funding from the commission, and contacted area nonprofits to provide period hygiene products. **Participation in GELI:** Along with the other regional youth councils, we led the town hall portion of the programming and were able to hear from the GELI participants on what issues are most important to them.

C. Survey on eldercare preparedness. At the end of last year we collaborated with Dr. Norstrand to modify and disseminate a survey on eldercare to better understand related needs. Because of limited response, we worked with an intern to modify the questionnaire and analyze the results.

Community support. Commissioners were special guests and attended the unveiling of the statue "Make Women Visible", LexSeeHer (<https://www.lexseeher.com/>) in Lexington, MA. From their website, "As America prepares to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution, Lexington tells a more inclusive story about women in every era. Women who had been forgotten, invisible, and erased, will now be seen and celebrated." Several state representatives and senators were also present.

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. Create and enact a robust orientation and onboarding plan that spans the full year to promote leadership and support commissioners, Athena Council members and volunteers and to increase our efficacy and capacity.

- a) As we bring in new commissioners, use their input to plan our meetings, to provide knowledge and logistical support, as well as working time so all can comfortably advise, bring in their network, practice advocacy, and continue to serve as advocates within and beyond MCSW.
- b) 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.

- c) Several of our Athena Council members have graduated. We plan to recruit additional members, especially those who are rising 9th - 11th graders, to join the group.

Goal 2. Continue to expand our community and network in the region, working in coalition as possible.

- a) Revitalize our Legislative Action Speaker series in our full group meetings, and publicize them through our mailing list/ targeted invitations
- b) Liaise with at least one other regional commission and/or existing coalition in our advocacy work.
- c) Make use of social media (and interns) to better disseminate information about our priorities and campaigns.
- d) Meet and connect with each of the state representatives/congressmen in our region to create a legislative network.

Goal 3. Advocate for a more robust informed consent policy for intimate exams.

We will continue our collaboration with the producers and legislative coordinators of At Your Cervix, and the coalition that we have built, which includes the Eastern Regional CSW, to specifically advocate for better protections. While we welcome the progress made by the MA legislature, as well as a federal Health and Human Services policy regarding informed consent for intimate exams, there are additional protections for patients, medical students and other healthcare professionals, such as refusal to participate without compromising care or training, as well as whistleblower protection, that we will continue to advocate for these in the fall and next legislative cycle.

Submitted by Connie Chow on May 20, 2024