



ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

FY25 Annual Report

Commissioners – FY25

Kirsten Alexander (Wenham)
Geetha Rao Ramani (Andover)
Sara Stanley, Chair (Rowley)
Amy Smith, Secretary (Lynn)
Brianna Sullivan, Treasurer (Newburyport)
Brenda Pena, Vice Chair (Lynn)
Helen McDermott Arsenault (Beverly)
Maeva Veillard Perry (Methuen)
Ivanna Solano, Commissioner (appointed January 2025)

Message from the Chair

This past fiscal year has been a time of growth, renewal, and deeper connection with the diverse communities of Essex County. We welcomed a new slate of officers and a new commissioner, realigned some of our practices, and made meaningful progress toward our mission to elevate and advocate for the voices and needs of women and girls across our region.

Despite the challenges, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to gender equity, economic justice, and public engagement. Through legislative advocacy, youth empowerment, listening circles, and coalition-building, we are proud of the work we have accomplished and optimistic about what lies ahead.

Administrative Updates

In June 2024, the Commission approved critical updates to our bylaws—fulfilling a key FY24 goal—based on recommendations from an ad hoc committee (Commissioners Sullivan, Alexander, and Stanley). These updates clarified governance structures and better aligned our operations with current needs.



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In January 2025, we welcomed **Ivanna Solano** to the Commission, filling the vacancy left by **Nicole McClain**, who resigned in July 2024. We thank Commissioner McClain for her dedicated service.

Mission and Values

Established by legislation signed by Governor Deval Patrick in 2010, the Essex County Commission on the Status of Women (ECCSW) was created to serve as a permanent and effective voice to advance the status of women and girls in Essex County.

We aim to uplift the voices of diverse women through: community outreach, legislative advocacy, community hearings and public education.

We are guided by the values of equity, inclusion, and the leadership of women in all aspects of life.

Legislative Advocacy

In FY25, ECCSW continued advocating for policies that directly address the pressing needs of women and families in Essex County, including affordable child care, fair wages, and housing stability. Priority legislation included:

- **The Common Start Bill (H.489/S.301)** – Universal early child care
- **The I AM Bill (S.1381/H.534)** – Menstrual product access in public institutions
- **Support for Working Parents in Public Office (S.422/H.669)**
- **Parity on Public Boards (S.2016)**
- **Domestic Violence Reports Confidentiality (HD3355)**



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- **Insurance Coverage for Doula Services (HD2576)**

On **March 24, 2025**, Commissioners Stanley, Alexander, and Solano participated in **MCSW Advocacy Day**, alongside Essex County residents, advocating directly with lawmakers.

Public Meetings and Transparency

We continued to host **monthly public meetings virtually** via Zoom and streamed them live on Facebook when possible. These forums have fostered public engagement, though we have also experienced Zoom security challenges, including inappropriate disruptions. Preventing such incidents will be a priority for FY26.

Programming Highlights

Programming is centered on our four mission priorities: community outreach, legislative advocacy, community hearings and public education.

Public Education - Women's History

- **Women's Equality Day – August 26, 2024**
ECCSW participated in Gloucester's event featuring city proclamations, a panel discussion with women leaders, and joyful recognition of specific women who have fostered positive community progress.
- **Power UP - Marblehead Initiative - March 2025**
ECCSW submitted a letter of support for the proposed women veterans' monument and peace garden in Marblehead.



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- **International Women's Day – March 8, 2025**

Commissioner Stanley participated in a rally in Ipswich, distributing the ECCSW survey flyers (see below for more information).

Public Education - Youth Empowerment

Now in its third year, our youth council, the Ginsberg Initiative, includes participants aged 14–21 from across Essex County. Led by intern Katherine Blasius and Commissioner Veillard Perry, highlights include:

- Attendance at MassNOW's Menstrual Equity Summit in January 2025 and advocating for the I Am Bill.
- Development of a community 'zine to share youth perspectives and activism.

Public Education - Empowerment through Safety

- **Coercive Control Community Conversation – January 15, 2025**

Commissioner Stanley joined a panel with Beverly Police and the District Attorney's Office to discuss new legislation expanding the definition of abuse in Massachusetts. The expanded eligibility for abuse prevention orders is an important opportunity for women, who are statistically impacted in greater numbers than men by abuse, to increase their safety, increase stability and have the opportunity to advance beyond their experience of abuse.

Community Hearings

- **Community Needs Survey - Launched in 2025**

The survey was developed and available in Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, and English, to ensure inclusive feedback on the needs of Essex County women and girls. We look forward to providing results in FY26.

- **Listening Circle for Girls – February 25, 2025**



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Held at Essex Tech in Danvers with over 50 students from various schools. Topics discussed included their needs and ideas for a more equitable Essex County:

- Reproductive health education beyond puberty education
 - Mental health and body image concerns
 - Gender stereotypes perpetuated by families
 - Desire for leadership opportunities and adult engagement
- **Listening Circle for Senior Women** – July 19, 2025
Held at Methuen Village with approximately 25 participants. Key concerns included:
 - Accessible transportation (including wheelchair accommodations)
 - Support for voting (absentee ballot access)
 - Assistance with navigating medical care
 - Education on avoiding scams

In Memoriam

In October 2024, we mourned the passing of **Patricia Fae Ho**, a former commissioner and lifelong advocate for women's rights. Her contributions and legacy continue to inspire our work.

Looking Ahead: FY26 Goals

1. **Mentorship & Leadership for Girls**
Expand the **Ginsburg Initiative** to include increased mentoring opportunities between commissioners and youth council members, and share leadership opportunities from regional partners across the county to increase access.
2. **Collaborative Impact**
Increase collaboration with organizations like Girls Inc., League of Women Voters, North Shore Chamber of Commerce - Thrive Initiative, and others, to align strategies and amplify collective voice. Potential avenues of action may include
 - Map existing efforts, identify overlap, and surface gaps in services or advocacy.



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- Explore joint programming, co-sponsored events, and aligned advocacy efforts, especially on topics like workforce development, maternal health, and political engagement.
- Strengthen a shared regional agenda for advancing gender equity and amplifying community voices through coordinated media campaigns and collective lobbying efforts.

3. **Mobilize Data to Inspire Action**

Share findings from listening circles and the 2025 Community Needs Survey with **elected officials** to influence policy and resource allocation.

4. **Encourage Women to Run for Office**

Promote civic participation by providing education, resources, and encouragement for women seeking public office and leadership roles on local boards.

Conclusion

As we conclude FY25, we are proud of the strides we've made and energized for the road ahead. The Essex County Commission on the Status of Women remains deeply committed to ensuring all women and girls—across age, race, background, and municipality—have access to the opportunities, protections, and respect they deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Stanley
Chair, ECCSW
May 20, 2025