



MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report 2025

Commissioners

Lisa MacDonald, Chair (Natick); Jennifer Wuelfing, Vice Chair (Hopkinton); Odessa Sanchez, Legislative Chair (Wellesley); Amie Rotondi (Medway); Sophia Rousseau (Natick); Alexandra Todorov (Framingham); Anne Mattina (Hopkinton); Kathleen Marchi (Millis).

Intern

Julie Karam- Athena Council Intern

Outgoing Members

None

Resigned during Fiscal Year 2024

Lindsay Brown (January 2025)

Cristi Apicella (January 2025)

Stacy Wilbur (July 2024)

Athena Council Members

Srihitha Sunkara	Hilary Reuter	Claire Watermullen	Sophia Reid
Lauren Lee	Maggie Lee	Grace Apicella	Grace Harvey
Aishani Ghosh	Anyia Khera	Yiwen Hao	Mia Dalzell
Sahbithi Pudota			



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, 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 cities of Framingham and 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) Menstrual Equity, b) Mental Health c) Protections and resources for individuals with lived experiences in commercial sex trade
- b) Women's Resources, Holiday Gift Drive www.metrowestwomensfund.com/
Teen girls living in emergency residential housing (Through December 2024)
- c) Partnering with other women organizations, welcomed members of the Framingham Commission on Women and Children to our February 2025 monthly meeting to discuss future partnership with MWCSW. We discussed legislative priorities, advocacy through events, amplifying voices, focusing on



surveys and data analysis, and utilizing social media and letter writing to strengthen our outreach.

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 R.I.A. (Ready, Inspire, Act). This organization met with us multiple times over the course of the year and we were proud to not only partner on a large-scale event, but also endorse our support for the Sex Trade Survivors Act, which included sending letters to local police chiefs and law enforcement agents to garner further support of the bill. In addition, through our partnership with R.I.A., we have made connections with other organizations throughout the state that provide similar supports and resources such as My Life, My Choice, Safe Exit Initiative, and Amirah.

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

Menstrual Equity	This bill would provide access to free menstrual products to all individuals in schools, shelters & prisons.	Sponsors: Jay D. Livingstone , Christine P. Barber, Patricia Jehlen	S. 1381/H. 534
Womens' Incarceration	An act to strengthen justice and support for sex trade survivors	Sponsor: Chynah Tyler	H.1795
Sex Trade Survivors	Sex Trade Survivors Act: This bill would provide a survivor-led, comprehensive, and proven approach to reducing commercial sexual exploitation and systems of prostitution.	Sponsors: Mary Keefe, Trisha Farley Bouvier, Cindy Friedman, Lydia Edwards	H.1597,S. 983



End abuse campaign – following the campaign to see what emerges that is getting the most traction and support

-Subscribe to enough abuse campaign for updates www.enoughabuse.org

Programming and Outreach

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2025:

Human Trafficking Prevention Breakfast

As part of January being Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the Metro West Commission co- sponsored the 2nd annual Human Trafficking Prevention Breakfast on Friday, January 24, 2025. This was an in-person event at MassBay Community College in Wellesley, and a joint collaboration with the EMMA Coalition, RIA, My Life My Choice, Safe Exit Initiative, and Amirah. All were pleased with the event, especially hearing our guest speakers - Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, DA Kevin Hayden (also last year's attendee) DA Joe Early, The event also featured a panel of experts with lived experiences and offered insights surrounding the myths, challenges, and solutions to end the commercial sex trade. We were pleased to welcome more than 90 guests in attendance for the event, which included our State Commission staff, state representatives, and many local leaders. We had a full spread of breakfast foods and information tables. Following the event we emailed Audra Doody(Safe Exit Initiative), and Heather Wightman(RIA) to state our intention to include their proposed legislation (Sex Trade Survivor Act) in our priorities for the year.

Athena Council Career Fair - Empowering Girls of All Ages to Achieve Their Dream Careers

On March 1st our Athena Council - facilitated an event at Bellingham Library where they hosted a career fair featuring women in the Metro West. We talked about career journeys and answered various questions from the young students present. As usual we were impressed with the thoughtful planning that went into the Athena Council event. It brought together many young girls from our region and Odessa Sanchez, Lisa McDonald and former commissioner Cristi Apicella-were among the guest speakers. Refreshments were served and we had a walk- up question/ answer period.



International Women's Day

Saturday March 8th we held our 2nd annual International Women's Day Event and Celebration at the Natick Commons Spiritual Center in Natick. A fun time was had by all and we enjoyed having the Athena Council members to introduced some of the panelists. Our IWD was a success because of the content and the hard work we put into it, despite facing limits on time and scheduling challenges. Guest speakers included, Freddie Kay, founder and President of Massachusetts Women's History Center, Kristen Pope, the Natick's first Black Select Board member, Anna Neiman, Fashion Entrepreneur and Designer, and Keynote speaker Jin In, author of Girl Power: Sustainability, Empowerment, and Justice. Chair Odessa Sanchez secured a digital copy of the Girl Power and plans to share with the other commissions at some point. We also had a book giveaway at the event.

Advocacy Day 2025

On Monday March 24th we attended Advocacy Day at the Massachusetts State House. Metro West represented in person by Commissioners , Lisa McDonald, Jennifer Wuelfing, and Odessa Sanchez. We spent the day listening to the speakers and meeting with district legislators. We had sit downs with Senator Jamie Eldridge, and Representative Alice Peisch. We dropped off folders and cookies at the offices of many other legislators and networked with many people to share our legislation priorities and brainstorm future projects/ collaborations. Following up with State Auditor Diana DiZoglio who we invited to our International Women's Day Event 2026. She is interested and we are inspired by all this year's work to start planning ahead for the IWD celebration 2026.

GELI 2025

On April 24th our Athena Council attended this year's GELI Conference at Woodshole, Cape Cod. Lead by AC Intern and chair, Julie Karam, and the Athena Council facilitated the Town Hall. We are very proud of the accomplishments of our Athena Council and the fact we are the first of the 11 Commissions to start a girl's chapter.



Goals for the next fiscal year

Listening sessions to determine next session legislative priorities

Over the last two years, the main goal of the MWCSW has focused on creating and maintaining new and existing partnerships with local organizations and agencies. At this point, the MWCSW has done a solid job with outreach and hosting events that center around our current legislative priorities and continuously highlighting our Athena Council. As we look to what's next and in preparation for the next legislative session beginning in January 2026, it's important that we take some time in the Fall of 2025 to host listening sessions with residents in the 28 towns and cities that we represent, to hone in on the most prevalent issues impacting women and girls in our region. Our listening sessions will include, but will not be limited to at least one in-person and one virtual public hearing. Dependent upon what these listening sessions yield, our regional commission is looking forward to setting our new legislative agenda that will likely blend some new legislative priorities as well as building upon our existing ones. We look forward to providing more information and assessing this initiative in the coming months.

Strengthening our Athena Council

As our Athena Council enters its seventh year since inception, we continue to be extraordinarily proud of the work of this youth group. This past year we developed and hired a former Athena Council intern, Julie Karem, to work with the girls and continue the great work being done. Julie will announce her successor soon and that young woman will be stepping into the role as intern this September. With other Athena Council spots opening, one of the most important things we will focus on is recruitment and selection, while ensuring that we have more representation throughout MetroWest on the Council. Following this, our focus in the fall will be onboarding and building this young group. The Athena Council will take a more active role in partnering with the regional commissioners this coming year; while there will be plenty of opportunities for the Athena Council to work independently, it has become increasingly apparent that the success of Athena Council becomes greater when both groups work together rather than as separate entities, allowing for increased visibility, mentoring opportunities, and leadership development. We remain committed and proud of the work being done by



Athena Council and it remains of utmost importance to continue to grow this program in the coming years.

Hosting a Film Screening and Discussion

Film screening and discussion postponed. Pushing for Fall 2025. Working on a date and local library space for a viewing of the film "The 13th Step" a documentary addressing the issue of "institutional abuse" and "institutional betrayal". (Institutional Abuse is the maltreatment of a person from a system of power. It can range from neglect to sexual abuse) - This is in line with our event in January, the sex trafficking awareness breakfast.

Organize Period Palooza

Host a Period Palooza event- depending on our funding, in partnership with Fihri-Owned and Founded by former Metro West Regional Commissioner, Ceylan Rowe. In line with our commitment to promote Menstrual Equity for all the girls and women in our region.

**Submitted by Chair-Elect Odessa Sanchez on May 20, 2025*