



PLYMOUTH COUNTY

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report 2025

Commissioners

Michelle Davidson, Chairwoman (Hanover); **Lisa Westgate**, Vice Chairwoman (Marshfield); **Tamara Dzialo**, Finance (Bridgewater); **Maude Gorman**, Secretary (Hingham); **Danielle Kempe**, Legislative Committee Chairwoman (Marshfield); **Kasey Bellegarde-Armstrong** (Plymouth); **Jacqueline Jones** (Brockton); **Daphne Remy Gomes** (Attleboro).

Two Commissioners termed out in December 2024: Elisabeth Arruda and Carolyn Riley, allowing us to welcome Daphne Remy Gomes and Kasey Bellegarde-Armstrong. The final (ninth) seat was offered to another applicant December 2024, but she declined. In May 2025, we submitted another recommendation for that role and are waiting approval from the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW).

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 COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



The PCCSW is responsible for studying, reviewing and reporting on the status of women and girls in Plymouth County, and it 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

The PCCSW selected the following legislation as our priorities for the 2025-2026 legislative cycle:

- **An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products (IAM Bill)**
(S.1549/H.2483)

Lead Sponsors: Senator Pat Jehlen, Representatives Jay Livingstone and Christine P. Barber

Coalition: Massachusetts Menstrual Equity

This bill provides access to free menstrual products to all menstruating individuals in schools, shelters, and prisons.

- **An Act Relative to Family Members Serving as Caregivers (H.1394/S.886)**

Lead Sponsors: Representative James O'Day and Senator Joan B. Lovely

This bill allows for family members, power of attorneys, adult children of patients, and other legally liable family to be compensated for their care taking through Mass Health.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



- **An Act Promoting and Enhancing the Sustainability of Birth Centers and the Midwifery Workforce (S.784/H.1117)**

Lead Sponsors: Senator Joan Lovely, Representatives Manny Cruz and Lindsay Sabodosa

Coalition: Bay State Coalition

This bill promotes and enhances the sustainability of birth centers and the midwifery workforce.

The PCCSW's decision to make those bills a priority came after a public listening session held Dec. 10, 2024. During that session, the attendees listed period poverty, caregiver support, and maternal health as top issues affecting them.

To support those bills, on March 24, 2025, commissioners Michelle Davidson, Danielle Kempe (Legislative Standing Committee Chair), Tamara Dzialo, Jacqueline Jones, and Daphne Remy Gomes attended MCSW's Advocacy Day at the Massachusetts State House. During the day, they met with Senator John Keenan; Senator Patrick O'Connor; and Jane Fulton, legislative aide for Representative Joan Meschino. At those scheduled meetings, the commissioners spoke about the importance of the bills the PCCSW has made a priority, sharing personal stories to emphasize why their passage is essential. All were receptive to the bills and our advocacy for them.

In addition, the commissioners had a brief joint meeting with Representatives Kathleen R. LaNatra and Michelle Badger. The commissioners also attempted to meet with Representative David DeCoste and Senator Kelly A. Dooner, who unfortunately were not at the State House that day.

Following the event, the PCCSW emailed all the county's state representatives and senators and shared its list of legislative priorities. As a result, Representative Badger



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



agreed to co-sponsor H.1117, An Act Promoting and Enhancing the Sustainability of Birth Centers and the Midwifery Workforce.

As part of our advocacy and support of An Act Promoting and Enhancing the Sustainability of Birth Centers and the Midwifery Workforce (S.784/H.1117), the PCCSW partnered with the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women (BCCSW) and the Eastern Regional Commission on the Status of Women (ERCSW) for an event addressing Black maternal health, attended by 25 people, including State Senator Joan B. Lovely.

Programming

The PCCSW implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2025: The Gift of Listening Public Hearing, My Sister's Keeper: Helping to Improve Birthing Opportunities and Black Maternal Health Outcomes, and Unity in Action: PCCSW at Plymouth Pride.

The Gift of Listening Public Hearing: This event was held Dec. 10, 2024, at Massasoit Community College, Brockton Campus. Attendance: Commissioners Elisabeth Aruda, Carolyn Riley, Michelle Davidson, Lisa Westgate, Jacqueline Jones, Danielle Kempe, and Maude Gorman; State Rep Joan Meschino; and 12 women from the community.

The purpose was to gather input from community members about pressing issues affecting women and girls in the county. Attendees shared personal testimonies and participated in small group discussions to identify key challenges and propose actionable solutions. Ten issues rose to the top of their concerns: gender wage gap, maternal and Black maternal health, period poverty, sex and human trafficking, workforce development, domestic violence, housing and economic challenges, caregiver stress and isolation, education on women's health, and food insecurity and childcare access.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



The testimonies guided the commissioners in selecting their legislative priorities for 2025-26, and they led to the Black maternal health event that they held on March 26, 2025. The commission wrote a report about the event and the top 10 issues and shared it with the state representatives and senators who represent Plymouth County. The stories and information will further help the commissioners advocate for the bills on their priority list.

My Sister's Keeper: Helping to Improve Birthing Opportunities and Black Maternal Health Outcomes: This event was held on March 26, 2025, at Bristol Community College in Taunton, MA. Attendees: PCCSW Commissioners Michelle Davidson, Jacqueline Jones, and Lisa Westgate; BCCSW Commissioners Stephanie Taylor, Millie Sanchez, and Shavon Tolson; State Senator Joan Lovely; and 12 women from the community.

Hosted by PCCSW, BCCSW, and ERCSW, the event featured a screening of the documentary *Aftershock* followed by a powerful panel discussion addressing the Black maternal health crisis.

Panelists included:

- Dr. Hafsatou (Fifi) Diop, MD, MPH, Assistant Commissioner for Health Equity, Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health
- Soraya, BirthKeeper, Sacred Birthing Village
- Lisa Field, Associate Director, Legislative Division, Massachusetts Nurses Association, and candidate for state representative
- Elizabeth Torrent, chief program officer, Health Imperatives
- Shalise Hammond, a social worker and mother who shared her birthing experience
- Xavier Cardona, co-founder of 365Dad, which provides support and programs for fathers



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



The evening brought together healthcare professionals, advocates, and community members to raise awareness, share lived experiences, and discuss recent legislation aimed at improving outcomes for Black mothers across Massachusetts. As a result, attendees left more aware of the healthcare crisis in the state, and commissioners received additional information to help in their advocacy and support for legislation in the 2025-2026 session: An Act Promoting and Enhancing the Sustainability of Birth Centers and the Midwifery Workforce (S.784/H.1117). PCCSW commissioners will use the information from the event in their future communications with state representatives and senators, as well as to submit testimony and perhaps an Op-Ed.

Unity in Action: PCCSW at Plymouth Pride: For the second year, PCCSW proudly joined the community to stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ individuals and families. The event was held June 29, 2025, at Nelson Park in Plymouth. As a sponsor and exhibitor, PCCSW hosted an advocacy booth to share resources, engage with attendees, and spotlight the Commission's ongoing work to advance equity through legislation and policy. As a result, dozens more people in the community are aware of the PCCSW and our work, and we have a closer relationship with Plymouth Pride organizers, whom we plan to partner with on future events.

Goals for the next fiscal year

1. *To increase awareness of the job opportunities women have working in the trades.* The PCCSW began planning a "women in the trades" event for May 2025, but commissioner illnesses and personal issues impacted their efforts. The event is being rescheduled for October 2025. This topic aligns with an issue identified in the PCCSW's listening session held in December 2024: workforce development. It also aligns with a topic discussed at the 2025 GELI event, during which girls talked about their experiences at trade high schools. The goal is to have women currently working in different trades/crafts share their career journeys, their successes, and what it is like working in that trade. Middle school- and high school-aged girls, along with their parents, will be invited.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Our next steps are to determine the date and confirm availability of the space at South Shore Technical High School in Hanover, MA. Then we will invite women to participate and girls and their parents to attend. Use of the venue is free, so the cost is expected to be \$800, including childcare, children's books and toys, food and drinks, swag bags and other promotional materials.

We will know we have achieved this goal when the event takes place, attendance is close to capacity (50 attendees), and we share the information we learn with girls' groups and schools in the county.

2. Gather more data and stories from women and girls in the county to inform our event planning and improve our communications with elected officials when advocating for bills. We want to build on what we started with this year's listening session but do things that don't require travel so more women and girls can participate. Ideas include surveys and virtual/online public hearings.

To make these happen, we will meet in September 2025 to decide the topics and timing; planning committee members; promotional and marketing details; tools needed; and if we need outside assistance/expertise. We may offer an incentive for completing the survey, which we anticipate will be the only cost.

We will know we have achieved this goal when we have 100 completed surveys, and we hold one virtual listening session attended by 50 women/girls who freely offer testimony.

3. Develop stronger relationships with our state reps and senators. We have strong relationships with some of our state reps and senators, but we can do better with the others. To do this, we plan to invite our state reps and senators to our meetings, to share reports from our surveys and listening session, and to hold at least one coffee session with them.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



To achieve this, our legislative standing committee will extend invitations each month to our reps and senators, and the chair of our program and events standing committee will distribute the reports from the surveys and listening session. There is no cost associated with those. In addition, the legislative standing committee and programs standing committee will plan a public coffee session with our elected officials. The cost associated with that includes up to \$400 for a venue; up to \$200 for coffee, tea, water and food; up to \$200 for childcare; up to \$200 for children's books and toys, up to \$100 for marketing and promotion.

We will know we have achieved this when at least one elected official attends a minimum of two monthly meetings, that at least 10 attend our coffee session, and at least three agree to co-sponsor or vote in favor of one of our top legislative priorities.

Submitted by Michelle Davidson on May 20, 2025.