



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Virtual Girls Listening Session
Tuesday, November 18, 2025
Virtual via Zoom

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Executive Summary

Every year, the Commission holds multiple public hearings, listening sessions, and other events that offer an opportunity to hear directly from women and girls around the Commonwealth. The purpose of a public hearing is to give community stakeholders the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns important to women, as well as the gaps or barriers they have experienced in the provision of services available from anywhere in the Commonwealth. The information collected influences the MCSW's advocacy and legislative priorities. Public Hearings help the MCSW effectively provide a permanent, effective voice for women across MA.

This hearing was hosted as a virtual event, with all participants joining virtually on Zoom. The listening session was guided with questions and polls given by staff members, allowing attendees to speak for 1-2 minutes. The MCSW also hosted American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and a mental health specialist.

Key Takeaways

Maggie - Athena Council, MetroWest

Maggie shared her concerns regarding youth social media use. At school, she is learning how China regulates media for those under a certain age. Maggie explained how American media often shows violence, such as the Charlie Kirk shooting, and how it can harm youth. She stated that although freedom of speech should be protected, we should find solutions to respect that right and still make social media safer. Additionally, Maggie highlighted how many public buildings do not offer free menstrual products. Menstrual products are a necessity that is not covered by federal programs.

Joyce – Athena Council, MetroWest

Joyce shared her experience of advocating for menstrual products in her school, noting supply shortages and poor-quality products and questioned why menstrual products are excluded from insurance coverage. She also brought up ideas of age-based social media restriction.

Sreyvan - Parent

Sreyvan highlighted generational and cultural differences in discussions regarding mental health. In different contexts, navigating and addressing mental health can be different on sometimes difficult. She emphasized the need of spaces where young people can feel safe discussing their experiences no matter their background.

Member - Athena Council, MetroWest

The Member discussed her experience with mental health awareness and communication with parents. She said that acknowledging her Indian heritage and seeking an Indian therapist to minimize cultural differences improved the mental health conversations with her parents at home.



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Nalaisha – Ginsburg Initiative, Essex County

Nalaisha shared her experience coming from a Hispanic family, noting how negative comments on her body made her insecure and affected her relationship with food. She highlighted the importance of safe spaces for girls navigating middle school and puberty.

Giselle Byrd – MCSW Commissioner

Giselle mentioned how we need to better understand how we choose to invest ourselves in social media and what we pay attention to. She said no matter the algorithm, we have the power to follow or unfollow, to delete or take a break.

Jaliyah – Women's Fund South Coast

Jaliyah stated how mental health is intertwined with all the issues brought up, saying how everyday consumption like the news affects our headspace. She highlighted the importance of being aware of one's space and what we consume.

Echo - Youth Mentor

Echo shared how they believe today's algorithms have the power to promote negativity online. They expressed the need for legislation regarding algorithm, noting that negativity should be searched for especially when youth have an increasing presence on social media.

Grace – Athena Council, MetroWest

Grace shared how her school requires phones to be in pockets during class and that this has helped her personally with productivity.

Quick Stats from the Poll Data

The MCSW conducted three polls throughout the session on topics relevant to the discussion. Each participant was allowed to click more than one option for each question. With an average of 32 respondents to our three poll questions throughout the listening session, the MCSW gleaned the following insights:

- 71% of poll participants reported that the most pressing issue facing girls right now is Mental Health, followed by 46% of participants indicating Body Image as a pressing issue.
- Instagram and news websites were the most popular ways to consume news, followed closely by TikTok for those in attendance.
- 71% of participants identified a family member as a role model in their lives!

Recommendations & Next Steps

The Commission heard concerns regarding youth mental health, digital safety, menstrual equity, cultural barriers, body images, and the need for supportive spaces for girls and young women.

The Commission recognizes a growing call for legislation addressing social media usage and age-related protections. Testifiers noted the effectiveness of phone restriction in school. The MCSW will further explore youth-centered digital wellbeing initiatives.



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The Commission will also continue to monitor the state of menstrual products as essential healthcare items and advocate for broader access in public spaces, especially schools, and explore menstrual product access through insurance coverage.

Hearing concerns regarding culturally competency in mental health services, especially for girls navigating intergenerational and cultural expectations, the Commission will research policy that expands access to mental health resources that reflect the diverse identities of girls and young women across the Commonwealth.

The participants of this hearing expressed their hope, rooted in community and shared effort and empowerment. The Commission acknowledges the importance of amplifying youth voices and will continue to create accessible ways for girls and women to use their voice and center these lived experiences in advocacy.

About the MCSW

The MCSW is an independent state agency that was legislatively created in 1998 to advance women of the Commonwealth to full equality in all areas of life and to promote their rights and opportunities. The Commission provides a permanent, effective voice for Massachusetts women and is comprised of 19 diverse members who are appointed by the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Caucus of Women Legislators. Commissioners serve in a voluntary capacity and the work of the Commission is facilitated by a staff of seven, assisted by year-round interns.

The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women and girls throughout their lives. For more than 25 years now, the Commission and our regional bodies have worked to advance the rights and opportunities of all women and girls across Massachusetts, and advance an inclusive environment for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, color, sex, age, disability (seen and unseen), genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, parental status, marital status, socioeconomic status or background.

Attendees

Regional Commissions Represented

Berkshire County
Essex County– The Ginsburg Initiative
Hampden County
MetroWest – Athena Council

Participating Organizations

Girls Unite / Follow My Steps
Girls Inc of the Valley
Women's Fund South Coast



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Investing in Girls Alliance
The Heart Wing Center
Girls Scouts of Eastern MA
Girl Scouts of Central & Western MA
Women's Fund of Western MA
Town of Hudson
The Theater Offensive
Wellness for the Culture

MCSW Commissioners

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Dr. Kimberly Shea, Secretary
Giselle Byrd
Whitney Dodds
Jean Fox

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