

Top Issues and Policy Priorities: Plymouth County Legislative Breakfast

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About the PCCSW

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. Its 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 representing all cities and towns 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 Commission is responsible for studying, reviewing, and reporting on the status of women and girls in the region and for making recommendations to improve access to opportunity and advance equity.

Through public hearings, meetings, and collaboration with community partners, the PCCSW works to assess needs, take action, and promote policies that support women and girls across Plymouth County.



Executive Summary

On April 18, 2026, the Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women (PCCSW) convened a Legislative Breakfast that brought together legislators, local officials, and community members for roundtable discussions on issues affecting women and families across the region.

Across conversations, a clear theme emerged: the systems intended to support women—particularly in healthcare, caregiving, and economic opportunity—are not keeping pace with real-world needs. Participants drew on both professional expertise and lived experience to highlight where gaps persist and where policy action is needed.

While most discussions focused on shared policy priorities, some conversations also explored concerns related to parental rights in education and healthcare, reflecting the range of perspectives brought by participants.

Five priority areas surfaced:

- **Women’s health**, including maternal health disparities and gaps in menopause and geriatric care
- **Support for family caregivers** and the need for compensation and reduced barriers
- **Access to menstrual products** and the broader impact of period poverty
- **Education and economic opportunity** for women and girls
- **Domestic violence** awareness and safe access to support services

Participants also engaged directly with legislators on key bills related to menstrual equity, caregiver support, and maternal health, emphasizing the importance of advancing policies that address basic needs and strengthen caregiving infrastructure.

The discussion underscored a shared priority: improving access, awareness, and coordination across systems to better support women, families, and communities throughout Plymouth County.

The systems intended to support women—particularly in healthcare, caregiving, and economic opportunity—are not keeping pace with real-world needs.



About the Legislative Breakfast

On April 18, 2026, the Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women convened a Legislative Breakfast, bringing together state and local officials, community members, and advocates for roundtable discussions on issues affecting women and families across the region. Approximately 20 Plymouth County residents participated, contributing lived experiences and perspectives that grounded the conversation in real-world challenges.

Discussions were shaped by both professional expertise and lived experience, creating space for thoughtful and, at times, candid dialogue.

The Commission was joined by the following elected officials and representatives:

State Legislators

- State Senator Mike Brady (Brockton; East Bridgewater, Halifax, Hanson, Whitman)
- State Representative Michelle Badger (Plymouth)
- State Representative Rita Mendes (Brockton)
- State Representative Bridget Plouffe (Brockton; East Bridgewater; West Bridgewater)
- State Representative Dennis Gallagher (Bridgewater)

Legislative Staff

- Phoebe Flynn, representing State Senator Dylan Fernandes (Kingston, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton)
- Lisa Adams, representing State Representative David DeCoste (Hanover, Norwell, Rockland, Hanson)

Local Officials

- Mark Linde, Bridgewater Town Council
- Susan Nicastro, Brockton City Councilor
- Tony Rodrigues, Brockton School Committee

Their participation contributed to a robust exchange of perspectives and strengthened the connection between policymakers and the communities they serve.

Top Issues & Policy Priorities

1. Women's Health

Overview: Access to comprehensive, high-quality healthcare emerged as a top concern, with gaps identified across the full spectrum of women's health—from maternal care to menopause and aging.

What We Heard:

Maternal health disparities:

Participants raised urgent concerns about inequities in maternal outcomes. In the United States, Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women, with similarly concerning disparities in Massachusetts.

Women not being heard in care settings:

Across discussions, a recurring concern was that women's symptoms are too often dismissed or minimized. Participants emphasized that this lack of responsiveness can lead to delayed diagnoses and preventable complications.

“Not every woman will have a child, but every woman will experience menopause.”

Gaps in menopause and perimenopause care:

Participants noted that many healthcare providers are not adequately trained in this phase of life, leaving women without guidance or support.

Workforce shortages:

There was strong concern about the lack of nurses, caregivers, and providers trained in women's health, particularly in geriatric care, where demand continues to grow.

Legislative Context

Participants discussed legislation related to the sustainability of birth centers and the midwifery workforce (S784/H1117). While there was broad support for expanding access to maternal care, concerns were raised about the complexity of the bill and the need for stronger alignment among stakeholders.

Recommended Actions

- Advance policies that address maternal health disparities and improve outcomes for Black women
- Expand provider training across all stages of women's health, including menopause and aging
- Invest in workforce development to address shortages in nursing, caregiving, and women's health services
- Strengthen coordination among healthcare providers to improve access and continuity of care

2. Support for Caregivers

Overview: Support for family caregivers emerged as a major priority, with participants highlighting the growing demand for care and the significant financial, emotional, and logistical burdens placed on those providing it.

What We Heard:

Unpaid and under-supported caregiving:

Participants consistently emphasized that family caregivers—often women—carry a heavy burden without adequate compensation or support. Many shared personal experiences of balancing caregiving responsibilities with work and other obligations.

Financial strain and workforce impact:

A recurring concern was the financial toll on caregivers, particularly for those who must reduce hours or leave the workforce entirely. This is especially challenging for individuals in hourly or non-salaried roles who are only paid when they are able to work.

“Family caregivers—often women—carry a heavy burden without adequate compensation or support.”

Keeping loved ones at home:

Participants stressed that supporting caregivers makes it possible for elderly and medically complex individuals to remain at home, rather than entering skilled nursing facilities, which often have limited availability.

System complexity and inefficiencies:

There was acknowledgment that existing caregiving systems are difficult to navigate and often inefficient. Participants noted that simplifying processes and reducing administrative burdens would make a meaningful difference for families.

Legislative Context

Participants expressed strong support for legislation that would allow family members and other legally responsible individuals to be compensated for caregiving through MassHealth (H1394/S886). Discussion included the importance of balancing access with appropriate safeguards to prevent fraud, while avoiding unnecessary administrative complexity.

Recommended Actions

- Advance legislation that provides compensation for family caregivers
- Reduce administrative barriers within caregiving systems to improve access and efficiency
- Provide financial and workforce supports for caregivers balancing employment and care responsibilities
- Expand resources that enable individuals to receive care safely at home

3. Access to Menstrual Products

Overview: Access to menstrual products was identified as a basic but often overlooked need, with participants emphasizing the real-world impact of limited access on health, dignity, and daily life.

What We Heard:

Unanimous support for expanded access:

Across discussions, participants expressed strong and consistent support for increasing access to menstrual products in schools, shelters, and correctional facilities.

The reality of period poverty:

Participants shared personal experiences and observations that highlighted the challenges many individuals face in accessing menstrual products. These gaps can affect school attendance, workplace participation, and overall well-being.

Stigma and lack of awareness:

A recurring theme was the stigma surrounding menstruation, which can prevent open conversation and limit awareness of available resources. Many participants noted surprise that such basic needs are still not consistently met.

“Access to menstrual products is not just a health issue. It is an economic issue, and it is a matter of dignity.”

Legislative Context

Participants discussed and voiced strong support for the I AM Bill (S1549/H2483), which seeks to expand access to disposable menstrual products in schools, shelters, and correctional facilities. The bill was widely viewed as a practical and necessary step toward addressing period poverty.

Recommended Actions

- Advance the I AM Bill to expand access to menstrual products statewide
- Increase awareness of period poverty and its impact on education and workforce participation
- Ensure consistent access to menstrual products in public institutions and community settings
- Reduce stigma through education and public awareness efforts

4. Education and Economic Opportunity

Overview: Participants emphasized the importance of expanding access to education and economic resources for women and girls, particularly in areas that support long-term financial stability and independence.

What We Heard:

Access to trade and vocational programs:

Participants stressed the need to create more opportunities for girls to enter trade and vocational programs. A recurring concern was ensuring that girls have equal access to these pathways and are encouraged to pursue them.

Education for incarcerated women:

There was strong support for increasing funding for educational programs within women’s correctional facilities. Participants emphasized that access to education—whether completing a high school diploma or learning a trade—is critical to successful reentry and long-term stability.

“Access to trusted information is essential for women to build financial stability and independence.”

Financial literacy and homeownership:

Participants highlighted the need for more accessible financial education, particularly around managing personal finances and navigating the homebuying process. This was identified as a widespread need, with particular challenges for newcomers who may lack trusted resources.

Barriers for newcomers:

A recurring concern was that some women, especially those new to the United States, may avoid seeking financial guidance or engaging with lenders due to fear or uncertainty about how it could affect their status.

Legislative Context

While no specific legislation was the focus of this discussion, participants emphasized the need for increased investment in education, workforce development, and community-based programs that support women and girls across different life stages.

Recommended Actions

- Expand access to trade and vocational programs for girls and young women
- Increase funding for educational and workforce training programs in correctional facilities
- Invest in financial literacy and homeownership education initiatives
- Ensure outreach efforts are culturally responsive and accessible to newcomer communities

5. Domestic Violence and Safety

Overview: Domestic violence remains a critical issue, with participants emphasizing the need for greater awareness of available resources and stronger support systems. This is particularly needed for individuals who may face additional barriers to seeking help.

What We Heard:

Awareness gaps persist:

Participants noted that many individuals are still unaware of the resources and support services available to domestic violence survivors. Increasing visibility and understanding of these services was identified as a key need.

Barriers for newcomers:

A recurring concern was the difficulty newcomers to the United States may face when reporting domestic violence. Participants emphasized that fear of jeopardizing immigration or residency status can prevent individuals from seeking help.

Lack of support systems:

Participants highlighted that individuals without strong personal or community support networks may be especially vulnerable and less likely to report abuse or access services.

“Fear of jeopardizing immigration or residency status can prevent domestic violence victims from seeking help.”

Legislative Context

While specific legislation was not the focus of this discussion, participants emphasized the importance of policies and funding that support domestic violence prevention, survivor services, and culturally responsive outreach efforts.

Recommended Actions

- Increase awareness of domestic violence resources and support services
- Ensure outreach efforts are accessible, culturally responsive, and inclusive of newcomer communities
- Strengthen support systems for individuals without established networks
- Continue funding and expanding domestic violence prevention and survivor support programs



Action Priorities for Policymakers

Priority Legislation

The Plymouth County Commission on the Status of Women encourages legislators to prioritize the following bills:

- **S1549/H2483 – An Act Relative to Menstrual Equity (I AM Bill):** Expands access to disposable menstrual products in schools, shelters, and correctional facilities.
- **H1394/S886 – An Act Relative to Family Members Serving as Caregivers:** Allows family caregivers to receive compensation through MassHealth, helping individuals remain at home while reducing financial strain on families.
- **S784/H1117 – An Act Relative to the Sustainability of Birth Centers and the Midwifery Workforce:** Seeks to expand access to maternal care and strengthen the midwifery workforce, with consideration for stakeholder alignment and implementation feasibility.

Systems and Policy Actions

Strengthen Healthcare and Caregiving Systems

- Expand provider training across all stages of women’s health
- Address workforce shortages in nursing, caregiving, and geriatric care
- Improve coordination and reduce barriers within care systems

Expand Education and Economic Opportunity

- Increase access to trade and vocational programs for girls
- Invest in financial literacy and homeownership education
- Support education and workforce training for incarcerated women

Increase Awareness and Access to Support Services

- Improve visibility of domestic violence resources
- Ensure outreach is culturally responsive and accessible
- Build trust with communities facing barriers to seeking support

Key Takeaways



The Legislative Breakfast brought together legislators, local officials, and Plymouth County residents for meaningful conversation about the issues shaping women’s lives today. The dialogue was grounded in both professional expertise and lived experience.

Clear priorities emerged. Participants pointed to gaps in healthcare, the growing strain on caregivers, and the need to expand access to basic resources and economic opportunity. Just as important, they emphasized the need to make systems easier to navigate and more responsive to real-world needs.

Not every conversation stayed within those core topics. Some participants raised concerns about parental rights in education and healthcare. These perspectives added to the discussion and reflected the range of voices in the room.

One thing was consistent. People want systems that work better and policies that reflect how women live.

The conversation doesn’t end here. Continued collaboration between policymakers and the community will be essential to turning these insights into action across Plymouth County.

 ***One thing was consistent. People want systems that work better and policies that reflect how women live.*** 



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Through public hearings, meetings, and collaboration with community partners, the PCCSW works to assess needs, take action, and promote policies that support women and girls across Plymouth County.

Contact Us and Follow Us on Social Media

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