



## **Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women Annual Report 2026**

### **Commissioners**

Chair: Makenzie Lennington, (New Bedford),  
Vice Chair: Santita Castellano, (Fall River),  
Treasurer: Sri Lakshmi Gandham, (New Bedford),  
Secretary/Clerk: Nedjine Desruisseaux (Fall River),  
Tanya Oliveira (Attleboro)  
Shavon Tolson (Taunton),  
Stephanie Taylor, Emerita (Taunton)

### **Mission**

The purpose of the Commission shall be to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women. The mission of the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Bristol County that facilitates and fosters community and inclusiveness among women. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

### **Strategic Planning & Organizational Growth**



This year marked an important period of growth and intentional planning for the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women.

The Commission successfully completed a Strategic Action Plan, establishing priorities and a framework to guide our work over the coming years. This plan is focused on increasing visibility, expanding regional representation, strengthening partnerships, and better serving communities that have historically been underrepresented in countywide engagement.

To support implementation of these priorities, the Commission hired an intern to assist with advancing strategic goals, outreach efforts, and community engagement. A key focus of this work is increasing visibility and relationship building in underserved and underrepresented cities and towns across Bristol County.



Additionally, the Commission onboarded three new commissioners, broadening regional representation and ensuring stronger reflection of the communities we serve across Bristol County.

While the Commission made meaningful progress this year, continued recruitment and sustained engagement remain priorities. With several open seats, the Commission remains focused on expanding representation and increasing participation to ensure perspectives from all communities are reflected in our work. Recruitment efforts will continue with a focus on geographic, racial, and professional diversity.

### **Community Engagement & Outreach**

To better understand the experiences, needs, and priorities of women throughout the region, the Commission developed and distributed a community needs survey. Findings from this survey will help shape programming, advocacy, partnerships, and outreach efforts moving forward.

The Commission also prioritized increasing its visibility and accessibility through community engagement efforts. Commissioners tabled at several community events across New Bedford and Fall River.

These outreach opportunities allowed the Commission to connect directly with residents, share information about our mission, gather feedback, and increase awareness of available resources and opportunities for civic engagement.



## **Advocacy & Community Priorities**

This year, the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women prioritized listening to the needs of our communities through a community needs survey. Findings identified several pressing concerns impacting women and families across Bristol County, including:

- Access to healthcare and health insurance (**38.8%**)
- Economic security (**32.7%**)
- Mental health access (**32.7%**)
- Reproductive rights (**30.6%**)
- Student debt relief (**28.6%**)
- Gender pay equity (**24.5%**)
- Racial inequity (**24.5%**)
- Housing security (**22.4%**)
- Food security (**18.4%**)
- Protection of LGBTQ+ rights (**18.4%**)
- Affordable childcare (**16.3%**)

These findings will help guide the Commission's future advocacy, outreach, partnerships, and priorities. Commissioners also increased community engagement by tabling at events throughout New Bedford and Fall River to raise awareness and connect directly with residents.

## **Goals for the Next Fiscal Year**

- Continuing implementation of the Strategic Action Plan
- Expand outreach efforts into underserved and underrepresented communities across Bristol County
- Increase awareness of the Commission through community engagement, partnerships, and public events
- Continuing to recruit commissioners to ensure broad representation across the region
- Utilize community needs survey findings to guide future priorities, advocacy, and programming
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations and other regional commissions serving women and girls

*\*Annual Report Submitted by Makenzie Lennington, BCCSW Chair, on 5/19/26*