



ESSEX COUNTY

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Essex County Commission on the Status of Women Annual Report 2026

Commissioners

Geetha Rao Ramani, **Chair** (Andover)
Brianna Sullivan, **Vice Chair** (Newburyport)
Ariana Contreras, **Treasurer** (Gloucester)
Ivanna Solano, **Secretary** (Lynn)
Jennifer Allport-Anderson (Salisbury)
Linette Perez (Lawrence)
Maeva Veillard Perry (Lawrence)
Brenda Ortiz Pena (Lynn) - Resigned March 2026
Helen Arsenault (Beverly) - Resigned April 2026

Mission and Values

Established by legislation signed by Governor Deval Patrick in 2010, the Essex County Commission on the Status of Women (ECCSW) was created to serve as a permanent and effective voice to advance the status of women and girls in Essex County. We aim to uplift the voices of diverse women through: community outreach, legislative advocacy, community hearings and public education. We are guided by the values of equity, inclusion, and the leadership of women in all aspects of life.

Message from the Chair

Over the past year, ECCSW deepened engagement across Essex County - listening to women and girls through surveys and community sessions and strengthening relationships with our legislative partners. I am grateful for the creativity, wisdom and enthusiasm that all the Commissioners have shared over the last year in helping to achieve this progress, which has culminated in a successful Legislative event in May 2026 and an upcoming Day of Service Celebration in June 2026. The African proverb that says “*If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together*” rang true this year as we were, as a collective, able to advance many of our core objectives together and laid the foundation for even greater impact ahead. I look forward to continuing this momentum as we work to make Massachusetts—and Essex County in particular—a place where women and girls can truly thrive.

Introducing New Commissioners

We are pleased to welcome three new Commissioners this past year - **Jennifer Allport-Anderson** from Salisbury, **Ariana Contreras** from Gloucester, and **Linette Perez** from Lawrence. All three come with impressive credentials working on issues related to public health, financial literacy and

girls empowerment in our community. We also extend our gratitude to **Brenda Ortiz Peña** and **Helen McDermott Arsenault**, who stepped down due to personal circumstances. Their contributions strengthened ECCSW's foundation and community reach.

Intern and their Accomplishments

ECCSW welcomed **Nalaisha Chamorro** as our Intern in September 2025. She has brought impressive leadership skills seen in her work with the Ginsburg Initiative (while enrolled as a student in Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence). Nalaisha will continue with ECCSW for another year and is developing new strategies to expand youth engagement across the county.

Ginsburg Initiative Members and their Accomplishment

Now in its fourth year, the Ginsburg Initiative continues to inspire with its creativity and commitment. The highlight of 2025 was the publication of the **"We Are Here" Magazine**, created entirely by youth members and focused on issues affecting young women today. Read the magazine here: <https://masscsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ECCSW-Ginsburg-Initiative-We-are-Here-Magazine.pdf> They distributed over 300 copies to local schools, students, and at the Girls Empowerment Leadership Initiative Summit and Menstrual Equity Summit, to share these resources with all young women. They also led a clothing drive in area schools that also focused on the problems with fast fashion, raising awareness through social media posts while collecting donations from local schools.

Legislative Advocacy

ECCSW advocated for four bills during the 2025-2026 Legislative Session. These include:

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 - <https://www.mmecoalition.com/>

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on Public Health

This bill would provide access to free menstrual products to all menstruating individuals in schools, shelters & prisons.

An Act to ensure gender parity and racial and ethnic diversity on public boards and commissions (S.2160/H.3398)

Lead Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis, Representatives Tram Nguyen and Dawne Shand

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight

This bill would promote diversity in leadership and governance that broadly reflects the demographics of our Commonwealth. The composition of each appointed public board and commission in the Commonwealth shall broadly reflect that of the general public.

Coalition: POB (parity on Boards) led by MCSW. Vice-Chair Sullivan serves as a ECCSW Representative on the Coalition.

An Act relative to insurance coverage for doula services (H.1312/S.789)

Lead Sponsors: Senator Liz Miranda and Representative Lindsay Sadosa

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on Financial Services

This bill will allow private insurance coverage for doula services.

An Act relative to domestic violence reports and confidentiality (H2031/S128)

Lead Sponsors: Senator John Velis and Representative Andres Vargas

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on the Judiciary

This bill will allow victim confidentiality in domestic violence reporting.

ECCSW submitted testimony on the **Parity on Boards** and **Virtual Public Meetings** in December 2025 and urged Senators in May 2026 to fund **MassNOW's Menstrual Equity Program**. Commissioners also met with legislators during office hours and individual meetings to discuss priorities. And finally, most recently, ECCSW held a Spring Legislative Luncheon on May 8, 2026. This event provided an opportunity to share our ECCSW Community Survey, input from several Listening Sessions, our legislative priorities and our youth work. (See below).

Public Outreach

Following a 2021 ECCSW survey during COVID, ECCSW launched its next community survey in 2025 to understand the key concerns for women across the county. The 12 question survey was offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic and distributed widely via social media and through postings around our communities. The core issues that emerged for women and their families in Essex County include:

- **Economic insecurity**
- **Housing instability**
- **Healthcare and insurance access**
- **Childcare affordability**
- **Reproductive rights**

These issues intersect, contributing to financial strain, mental health challenges, food insecurity, and barriers to independence. Women emphasized the urgent need for **affordable housing, high-quality childcare, pay equity, and accessible healthcare**. (More details on the survey results are available, upon request, and will soon be shared on our site).

In December 2025, ECCSW held a listening circle at the **MapleWoods Senior Living Center in Wenham, MA**. Residents highlighted the lack of affordable housing options and veterans housing for senior citizens, the need for more transportation into town and better access to health care.

In April 2026, ECCSW went to Gloucester for a listening session at the **Rose Baker Senior Center** where over a dozen women joined to share views on topics ranging from transportation, access to foods and affordable housing. In particular, Gloucester lacked adequate shelter beds for women, pushing some women to go elsewhere. Childcare remains costly. The Gloucester economy revolves around coastal fisheries but the women supporting that industry are left behind. Finally many also expressed alarm about federal efforts to restrict voting rights (SAVE Act).

Next month, the Ginsburg Initiative will host a **Day of Service** bringing together youth, families, and legislators for a **Period Palooza** to assemble period-care packets.

Finally ECCSW continues to hold its public meetings on the first Thursday of every month virtually, or on occasion, in person. These serve as opportunities for community to attend the ECCSW public meetings to bring specific topics to the Commission's attention.

Goals for the Next Fiscal Year

Looking ahead, ECCSW will focus on:

- Advocating for **childcare access, affordable housing, domestic violence support** and support for **senior women and girls**
- Increasing public participation in general through more outreach to partners
- Simplifying **legislative calls to action** for residents, including through promoting the **MCSW Take Action Hub**
- Creating a countywide resource guides to support women navigating work, caregiving, and financial responsibilities.

Conclusion

ECCSW had a productive year marked by deeper community engagement and stronger legislative partnerships. We look forward to continued collaboration with MCSW, regional commissions, community partners, and the public as we work to advance equity for all women and girls in Essex County.

Submitted by Geetha Ramani, Chair on May 20, 2026