



Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women & Girls

Annual Report
July 2025- June 2026

Commissioners

Sasha N. Viands – Holyoke
Magdalena Gomez – Springfield
Dr. Nicole Esposito – Longmeadow
Cori Rolland – Southwick
Femi Stoltz - Springfield
Lydia Malone - Holyoke
Rachelle Hannoush - West Springfield
Dr. Vanessa Martínez - Holyoke

Elected Officers:

Dr. Vanessa Martínez — Chair
Sasha N. Viands — Secretary
Dr. Nicole Esposito — Vice Chair

Mission and Values

The mission of the Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (HCCSWG) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women and girls across Hampden County that facilitates and fosters community and inclusiveness. The purpose of the Commission shall be to advance women and girls toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women and girls.

We are committed to amplifying the voices of women across our community — through grassroots outreach, legislative advocacy, public hearings, and education. Everything we do is rooted in equity, inclusion, and a deep belief in the power of women's leadership.

Public Meetings and Transparency

We continued to host monthly public meetings virtually via Zoom. Our Spring 2026 intern participated regularly. We want to begin inviting community organizations to share information and participate in our monthly meetings beginning in Spring 2026.

Advocacy

We delivered written testimony in support of three pieces of legislation. The “I Am” Bill (H.4611/S.2640), The Ingredient Disclosure Bill (H.2375/S.2641), and the Protect Act H.5305. We also delivered oral testimony in support of the Protect Act.

We identified several issues as critically important, but with available bandwidth chose to hone in on menstrual equity advocacy, and general protections for women and girls of our county via the Protect Act.

To address these issues, we offered testimony to the appropriate Legislative Committees and also hosted a Legislative Breakfast in March, 2026, during which time we had the opportunity to speak with local leaders about these issues and additional legislative priorities for the session.

The following legislation was endorsed by the Hampden County Commission and aligns with our commission's mission and priorities. Our focus is to support women and girls in Hampden County facing housing and food insecurity, access to healthcare, and financial independence. This has been reflected in our strategic plan as well as our events this year.

- An Act establishing community fridges to address food insecurity (S.62/H.126)
- An Act to provide reproductive health care to incarcerated individuals (H.2658)
- An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (IAM Bill) (S.2640)
- S.1119/H.1922 Capital Equity Bill: An Act relative to Fair Investment Practices
- Bill S.421/Bill H.46. Establish & Fund Financial Literacy Curriculum

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2025-2026: A strategic planning workshop, a financial investment community event, and two GELI sessions.

Strategic Planning Workshop: An in-person strategic planning workshop was held on December 8, 2025 at the West Springfield public library. During this meeting, the HCCSWG agreed to focus on three key pillars under Social Determinants of Health including; Physical/oral health, mental health and financial health. Priorities for the first half of 2026 would target three areas focused on 1. maternity including access to care, 2. financial and educational freedom and 3. life/professional transition planning.

The strategic planning meeting also defined the need for new committees including a Marketing and Events committee. The M&E committee would focus not just on

marketing planned events but building a better overall marketing plan to increase brand awareness for HCCSWG. An outline of a marketing plan was documented. The M&E committee continues to meet once or twice a month. All of the outputs and recommendations from this workshop were voted on and approved at the January 2026 full commission monthly meeting.

Financial Investment Workshop: The Regional Commission held an in-person workshop at the YWCA in Springfield with a local financial planner. The financial planner was a woman with a local business and a commitment to helping other women learn to become financially independent. The event was held on December 1st, 2026 from 6:00pm-8:00pm and topics included budgeting, investment strategies, and wealth management. This workshop was well-attended and served as a resource to women in Hampden County that has persisted after the event.

GELI sessions: On top of this programming, our Hampden County Commission was represented at the Girls Empowerment Leadership Institute in 2 amazing ways: Commissioners Viands and Martínez leading a workshop “Leading Through Conflict: Skills for Stronger Teams & Stronger Communities” and our intern Shaquetta Batchelor co-led a session on the “I am” Bill and Menstrual equity.

**Note: The health care event originally planned for May 2026 was postponed to Fall 2026 due to commissioner capacity.*

Goals for the Next Fiscal Year

Goal 1. Strategic Engagement with Community Organizations supporting women and girls. The organizations serving women and girls in Hampden County are some of our most important and currently untapped partners — and we want to work closely with them. The Commission will build on its current relationships by deepening connections with community organizations, inviting them to share their work at our public meetings, and exploring how we can collaborate on events and programming that benefit the women and girls we all serve. By bringing more community voices into our meetings and strengthening these partnerships, we will better represent the needs of women and girls countywide — and ensure more people know about and are engaged with our legislative priorities.

In our May 2026 meeting, we took numerous steps to move us on the issue of deepening engagement with increased outreach and community engagement including,

- reviewing our bylaws and commission purpose to see which items we are strong on, which we need to increase, and which are not being accomplished
- discussing commissioner communication issues over the past few months,
- discussing commissioner capacity needs to see if we can each individually commit to work 5-10 hours a month on commission projects, with sometimes it being more
- acknowledging that our current system is improved from previous year and still needs to be improved

- deciding to take June and July off (shut down most commission work) to assess our individual capacities
- needing to table at external community events to increase visibility of our work - we started a [google spreadsheet](#) to keep track of upcoming and seasonal events to table at.
- voting on two new commissioners to start June 1, 2026

We are also planning for our August meeting to be in person - part joyful connection, part regular meeting and part strategic plan. This meeting we will create some community agreements (Magdalena has agreed to lead us in that process), discuss the work we want to do, discuss our capacity to put in 5-10 hours a month on commission projects, set up regular meetings for the different committees, and truly plan out the year calendar, including the State House legislative day, GELI, Baypath conference and more.

We will know we have achieved this when we have a full commission of 9 commissioners who commit the time needed to do the work, have a planned out yearly calendar of community organizations coming to our monthly meetings and have a yearly calendar of our community and legislative commitments.

Goal 2. Develop stronger relationships with our state reps and senators. We want to develop strong relationships with our local representatives in Hampden County, our state reps and senators. To do this, we plan to invite our state reps and senators to our meetings, to share reports from our surveys, and to hold at least one legislative breakfast in Spring 2027.

To achieve this, we want to extend invitations each month to our reps and senators (to join our public meetings), and send them reports and other materials we develop regarding our surveys, testimony, and legislative priorities. In addition, the legislative standing committee and programs standing committee will plan a legislative breakfast with our elected officials. Cost will be built into our Spring 2027 grant proposal.

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 legislative breakfast, and at least three agree to co-sponsor or vote in favor of one of our top legislative priorities.

Goal 3. Gathering stories and data on women and girls in Hampden County. To better serve women and girls in Hampden County, the Commission will prioritize listening — gathering stories, data, and community input that strengthen our programming and sharpen our advocacy. In the short term, we will meet people where they are by tabling at community events countywide, offering a short survey to fill out and information about our legislative priorities. Over time, we aim to build a sustainable model for mini public hearings in every town in the county, making civic participation more accessible. Virtual hearing formats and regional partnerships with fellow Western

Mass commissions are also being considered. To move this work forward, the Commission will hold a planning session in August 2026 to align on topics, timing, capacity, and logistics — including marketing needs and any outside support required.

We will consider this goal achieved when we have collected 100 surveys and tabled at 20 or more events across Hampden County.

Submitted by:

Dr. Vanessa Martínez

Chair of Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women & Girls,

May 21, 2026