



MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report 2026

Commissioners:

Odessa Sanchez, Chair (Wellesley); Jennifer Wuelfing, Vice Chair (Hopkinton)
Lisa MacDonald (Natick); Amie Rotondi (Medway); Sophia Rousseau (Natick);
Alexandra Todorov (Marlborough); Anne Mattina (Hopkinton); Kathleen Marchi (Millis)

Intern

Grave Harvey- Athena Council

Athena Council Members

Srihitha Sunkara	Hilary Reuter	Claire Watermullen	Sophia Reid
Lauren Lee	Maggie Lee	Grace Apicella	Grace Harvey
Aishani Ghosh	Anya Khera	Yiwen Hao	Mia Dalzell
Sahbithi Pudota			

Mission

The purpose of the MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women (herein "MWCSW") shall be to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote the rights and opportunities for all women. The mission of the MetroWest Commission is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women in MetroWest communities, described by Chapter 335 of the Acts of 2014 as including the towns of Ashland, Bellingham, Dover, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Norwood, Sherborn, Southborough, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Wayland, Wellesley, Westborough, Weston and Wrentham and the cities of Framingham and Marlborough. The MetroWest



Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

Our goal as a Commission, beyond our mission statement as defined above and stated in our by-laws, is to strengthen our ability to advocate on behalf of MetroWest women. We seek to do this by listening, learning, and informing ourselves about the issues that matter to the majority of women in our region, determine effective outreach strategies and developing a robust list of stakeholders. These efforts are intended to improve our ability to play a role in the support and advancement of women and the promotion of their rights and opportunities.

Advocacy

As demonstrated through our ongoing outreach, programming, and legislative priorities, MWCSW prioritized the following issues:

- a) Menstrual Equity, b) Mental Health c) Protections and resources for individuals with lived experiences in commercial sex trade
- b) Women's Resources, Holiday Gift Drive www.metrowestwomensfund.com/
Teen girls living in emergency residential housing (Through December 2025)
- c) Partnering with other women organizations, welcomed members of the Framingham Commission on Women and Children to our February 2025 monthly meeting to discuss future partnership with MWCSW. We discussed legislative priorities, advocacy through events, amplifying voices, focusing on surveys and data analysis, and utilizing social media and letter writing to strengthen our outreach.

Our commitment to each of these issues is continuously demonstrated through our outreach, programming, and partnerships with MetroWest agencies, organizations, and state legislators whose focus centers on one or more of these issues. Specifically, over the course of this year we have strengthened our partnership with R.I.A. (Ready, Inspire, Act). This organization met with us multiple times over the course of the year and we were proud to not only partner on a large-scale event, but also endorse our support for the Sex Trade Survivors Act, which included sending letters to local police chiefs and law enforcement agents to garner further support of the bill. In addition,



through our partnership with R.I.A., we have made connections with other organizations throughout the state that provide similar supports and resources such as My Life, My Choice, Safe Exit Initiative, and Amirah.

The following outlines the MWCSW legislative priorities in support of proposed state legislation:

Menstrual Equity	This bill would provide access to free menstrual products to all individuals in schools, shelters & prisons.	Sponsors: Jay D. Livingstone , Christine P. Barber, Patricia Jehlen	S. 1381/H. 534
Womens' Incarceration	An act to strengthen justice and support for sex trade survivors	Sponsor: Chynah Tyler	H.1795
Sex Trade Survivors	Sex Trade Survivors Act: This bill would provide a survivor-led, comprehensive, and proven approach to reducing commercial sexual exploitation and systems of prostitution.	Sponsors: Mary Keefe, Trisha Farley Bouvier, Cindy Friedman, Lydia Edwards	H.1597,S. 983

End abuse campaign – following the campaign to see what emerges that is getting the most traction and support: www.enoughabuse.org

Programming and Outreach

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2026:

Voices Against Violence Walk - September 2026

MWCSW walked for this annual fundraiser. It was held in Framingham at the SMOC complex, and we enjoyed setting up a visible table for outreach to the community.



After the walk we had a debriefing and continued our brainstorming of how we can support the issues that affect the girls and women in our community.

Human Trafficking Prevention Breakfast

As part of January being Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the Metro West Commission co-sponsored the 2nd annual Human Trafficking Prevention Breakfast in January 2026. This was postponed due to weather and moved to zoom format. It was a joint collaboration with the EMMA Coalition, RIA, My Life My Choice, Safe Exit Initiative, and Amirah. All were pleased with the event, especially hearing our guest speakers - Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, DA Kevin Hayden (also last year's attendee) DA Joe Early, The event also featured a panel of experts with lived experiences and offered insights surrounding the myths, challenges, and solutions to end the commercial sex trade. Following the event we emailed advocates to state our intention to include their proposed legislation (Sex Trade Survivor Act) in our priorities for the year.

International Women's Day

Sunday March 8th 2026 we held our 3rd annual International Women's Day Event and Celebration at MassBay Community College in Wellesley. A fun time was had by all.

The MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women (MWCSW) held its 3rd Annual International Women's Day celebration, "Giving to Gain," taking place on Sunday, March 8, 2026. This inspiring, free community event honored the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women and girls while advancing advocacy, unity, and gender equality. In the spirit of International Women's Day, the program highlighted the resilience, strength, and contributions of women from diverse backgrounds.

The event featured keynote speaker Diana DiZoglio, Massachusetts State Auditor, along with artistic performances by Comedian Vi, The Girl Scouts of Natick fashion show, wearing a time line of GS uniforms of the past years, dancer and choreographer Shyann Chalmus, and vendor displays from women-owned businesses including Sleepy Baker, Wellesley Books, We Are Fihri, and Lovely Decor By Y (Yolanda Medina). In addition,



a door raffle fundraiser raised money for We Are Fihri to combat period poverty by providing menstrual hygiene kits to individuals in need.

Guest speakers included, Freddie Kay, founder and President of Massachusetts Women's History Center, and MWCSW Commissioner Lisa MacDonald narrated the Girl Scout Fashion Show.

SUFFS SHOW – March 2026

Members joined the Women's History Center to see the Musical SUFFS together. It was at the Boston Emerson Theater and “Watching Suffrs reminded us why our work with the Metro West Commission on the Status of Women matters so deeply. The fight for equity didn’t end with the suffragists — we carry it forward every day in our communities.”

GELI – April 2026

GELI - Girls Empowerment Leadership Initiative held its annual summit at U Mass Amherst on April 20th, 2026. Our Intern and Athena Council member Grace Harvey was asked to lead the menstrual equity listening session which was focused on the I AM Bill and our advocacy efforts. In this session, we got real about periods—something that affects so many of us but still isn’t talked about enough. We discussed menstrual product access and period stigma, and how the I AM Bill is working to make things better. GELI was attended by multiple schools and organizations for girls all over the state.

MWCSW Goals for the Next Fiscal Year

1. Listening sessions to determine next session legislative priorities

Over the last two years, the main goal of the MWCSW has focused on creating and maintaining new and existing partnerships with local organizations and agencies. At this point, the MWCSW has done a solid job with outreach and hosting events that



center around our current legislative priorities and continuously highlighting our Athena Council.

We'd like to support the AC creating a publication like the Ginsburg Initiative has done. As we look to what's next and in preparation for the next legislative session beginning in January 2027, it's important that we take some time in the Fall of 2026 to host listening sessions with residents in the 28 towns and cities that we represent, to hone in on the most prevalent issues impacting women and girls in our region. Our listening sessions will include, but will not be limited to at least one in-person and one virtual public hearing. Depending upon what these listening sessions yield, our regional commission is looking forward to setting our new legislative agenda that will likely blend some new legislative priorities as well as building upon our existing ones. We look forward to providing more information and assessing this initiative in the coming months.

2. Strengthening our Athena Council

As our Athena Council enters its eighth year since inception, we continue to be extraordinarily proud of the work of this youth group. This past year we developed and hired an Athena Council intern, Grace Harvey, to work with the girls and continue the great work being done. Grace has already begun interviews for her successor and that young woman will be stepping into the role as intern this September. With other Athena Council spots opening, one of the most important things we will focus on is recruitment and selection, while ensuring that we have more representation throughout MetroWest on the Council. Following this, our focus in the fall will be onboarding and building this young group. The Athena Council will take a more active role in partnering with the regional commissioners this coming year; while there will be plenty of opportunities for the Athena Council to work independently, it has become increasingly apparent that the success of Athena Council becomes greater when both groups work together rather than as separate entities, allowing for increased visibility, mentoring opportunities, and leadership development. We remain committed and



proud of the work being done by Athena Council and it remains of utmost importance to continue to grow this program in the coming years.

3. Hosting a Film Screening and Discussion

Film screening of the "13th Step" was an idea forwarded by MWCSW member Amie Rotondi. "The 13th Step" is a documentary addressing the issue of "institutional abuse" and "institutional betrayal". (Institutional Abuse is the maltreatment of a person from a system of power. It can range from neglect to sexual abuse) - took place with the support of other MWCSW Commissioners at the Medway Public Library on November 1st, 2025.

**Submitted by MWCSW Chair Odessa Sanchez on May 22, 2026*