



## **Upper Middlesex Commission on the Status of Women**

### **Annual Report 2025-2026**

#### **Commissioners**

Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Chair (Somerville, term begun 01/01/2025); Jessica Kallin, Vice Chair (Ashby, term begun 01/01/2024); Doreen Wade, Treasurer (Dracut, term begun 01/01/2025); Diane Randolph Jones, Secretary (Acton, term begun 01/01/2024); Brianna Savage (North Reading, term begun 01/01/2026); Zainab Aderinwale (Malden, term begun 05/01/2026); Anna Holt (Lowell, term begun 05/01/2026); Amanda McMahan (Waltham, term begun 05/01/2026); Saima Siddidi (Medford, term begun 05/01/2026)

#### **Mission**

*The mission of the Upper Middlesex Commission on the Status of Women and Girls is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women and girls across the Upper Middlesex region 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 and girls throughout their lives.*

The Upper Middlesex Commission on the Status of Women includes the towns of Acton, Arlington, Ashby, Ayer, Bedford, Belmont, Billerica, Boxborough, Burlington, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Concord, Dracut, Dunstable, Groton, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, North Reading, Pepperell, Reading, Shirley, Stoneham, Tewksbury, Townsend, Tyngsborough, Wakefield, Westford, Wilmington, Winchester, and the cities of Cambridge, Everett, Lowell, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Newton, Somerville, Waltham, Watertown, and Woburn.

#### **Message From the Chair**

The 2026 FY was one of great change within the UMCSW. Between June 2025 and Dec 2026 five commissioners either resigned or finished the end of their terms, leaving us with only four Commissioners in January 2026. Among those four, two had been commissioners for less than a year. Among those who left the commission in the second half of 2025 were the founding members of the UMCSW which left us with a vacuum in terms of institutional knowledge, systems, and strategies. Additionally, the fall of 2025 saw the Commission in a slow period with programming waning as individual schedules and commitments took priority. As a result, the last five months have been a rebuilding phase, with nearly all operational functions of UMCSW needing to be reset and/or rebuilt while also interviewing, identifying, and beginning to onboard

five new Commissioners. As of May 1, 2026 (only 20 days ago at the time of this writing) we have a fully woman-ed UMCSW for the first time in a year. As of May 2026, we have begun to organize subcommittees once again. As of May 2026, we have begun to visit/revisit the core requirements of our roles and the resources and tools at our disposal. As of May 2026, we have begun to feel whole. With our new commissioners on board, we are now rebuilding and looking toward the future. This is *\*the\** highlight of our year.

With this in mind, I respectfully ask the MA State Commission on the Status of Women to see our annual report as a reflection of the commitment of our current UMCSW commissioners (named above) to keep moving forward in challenging times, and to take on the important work before us with energy, skill, and joy. This we have in abundance at this moment. Once we firm up the institutional/logistical/operational aspects of our work, we feel confident in our capacity to carry out our mission.

### **Advocacy**

This year we maintained a focus on the same legislative priorities from 2025. This list is noted at the bottom of this section. Due to our shifting focus this year (reconstituting the commission and rebuilding our systems and strategies), legislative advocacy ceased.

Commissioner Doreen Wade was a stalwart attendee at the statewide legislative meetings and we appreciate her regular reporting back on the topics at the state level.

We are pleased to note that as of May 2026, we have a Chair of our Legislative Subcommittee and are working hard to resume and increase our legislative and advocacy work in the coming year.

### **S.2160/H.3398**

**An Act to ensure gender parity and racial and ethnic diversity on public boards and commissions.**

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

### **S.1549/H.2483**

**An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products ( I AM Bill)**

Lead Sponsors: Senator Pat Jehlen, Representatives Jay Livingstone and Christine P. Barber

### **S.2060**

**An Act establishing a tax credit for families caring for elderly relatives and victims of Alzheimer's and Dementia**

Lead Sponsor: Senator Patrick O'Connor

### **H.1394/S.886**

**An Act relative to family members serving as caregivers**

Lead Sponsors: Representative James O'Day and Senator Joan B. Lovely

### **S.1485/H.2401**

**An Act providing for safe and consensual sensitive examinations**

Lead Sponsor: Senator Jo Comerford, Representatives Mindy Domb and Kimberly Ferguson

### **Programming**

The UMCSW organized one listening session with local representatives and residents in Ashby which had to be rescheduled due to weather events beyond our control. This listening session will be held in Ashby at the Ashby Public Library on June 2, 2026. We will be joined by Senator John Cronin and Representative Margaret Scarsdale.

At the time of this report, a second event is being organized in Somerville for later in June 2026 and the commissioners are working to develop a plan for a virtual listening session for the wider region. Ideally, all of these sessions will help inform our decisions in the 2027 FY regarding our legislative priorities.

As indicated in the Chair's Report, the capacity of our commission to plan and carry out events this year has been limited by our significantly reduced number of commissioners and a reorganization of our time to rebuild the infrastructure of the UMCSW.

Additionally, this commission is hoping to identify ways to make listening sessions and other events for residents in our region be as inclusive and accessible as possible (eg: public transportation; language equity; etc), as well as working to develop collaborations with non profits and other city/town commissions in the coming year.

Now that we have a full slate of commissioners (as of 5/1/2026), and a named Chair of our Programming subcommittee, we anticipate being able to more effectively develop and carry out programming in the coming year.

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

**Goal 1:** *Rebuild the infrastructure and culture of UMCSW to ensure full capacity for regional commission work*

- Markers of Success
  - All commissioners feel comfortable and confident accessing and making use of all the tools and resources for the UMCSW
  - Our three standing subcommittees are active and able to report on progress at each full commissioner meeting.
  - All commissioners are actively engaged in the work of at least one subcommittee
  - All commissioners seek out and receive training on aspects of the Commission work that they are unfamiliar with
  - All commissioners participate in at least two public events/programs of the Commission during the 2027 FY
- Resources Needed:
  - Time and space for an in-person retreat to map plans and create a commission culture among our commissioners, four of whom have been on the commission

less than one month at the time of this writing, one of whom has been on the commission less than five months at the time of this writing.

- Data from MA State Commission on Status of Women 2024-25 Survey to better understand patterns in the needs of MA women and girls
- Support from Regional Commissions Director Tina Games as we move into this new era for the commission

**Goal 2:** *Identify new regional legislative priorities for the 2027 fiscal year, develop programming and legislative engagement around these:*

- Markers of Success:
  - By end of September 2026 have identified new legislative priorities for UMCSW to focus on for 2026 FY
  - Develop a process to track and regularly report out on their progress to all UMCSW commissioners (including but not limited to regular Commission meeting updates)
  - A majority of UMCSW Commissioners participate in 2027 Advocacy Day on the hill.
  - Develop contacts and relationships between commissioners and all MA Reps and Senators from our region.
  - Align our programming with legislative priorities

**Goal 3:** *Build out and grow our communications and outreach capacity to both share our work all across our region and hear from/learn from women and girls across our region.*

- Markers of Success:
  - Our social media platforms are active and being used to share our work, the legislation we are following and the needs of our constituents.
  - Constituents from across our region are engaging with our social media platforms.
  - Develop strategies to engage a wide, diverse set of regional residents in the work of our commission, with specific attention to meeting the needs of non-English speakers, and those with limited access to in-person events.
  - Develop strategies to engage residents of our region at local and regional events that also attend to or draw the attention of women and girls in our region.
  - Increase our programming in FY 2026 with at least 5 events we host/cohost.
  - Identify and bring on board a social media intern (possibly)
- Resources Needed:
  - Data from MA State Commission on Status of Women 2024-25 Survey.
  - Financial Support for intern
  - Financial and logistical support for meeting the needs of non English-speaking constituents.

*\*Respectfully submitted by: Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, UMCSW Chair, May 20, 2026*