



# **Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women**

## **2021 Annual Report**

### ***Commissioners***

**Anna Noble Dunphy, *Chair*** (*Falmouth*)  
**Tara Wallace, *Vice Chair*** (*Hyannis*)  
**Linda Cebula, *Secretary*** (*Harwich Port*)  
**Mary Waygan, *Treasurer*** (*Mashpee*)  
**Helen Bresnahan, *Emerita*** (*Bourne*)

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**Tina Games** (*Harwich*)  
**Natalia Frois** (*Hyannis*)  
**Katia Dacunha** (*Hyannis*)  
**Lynda wan-N'Tani** (*Harwich*)  
**Mary Reardon Johnson** (*South Yarmouth*)  
**Sue Mynttinen** (*Nantucket*) – *\*appointed January 2021*  
**Catarina Parache** (*Hyannis*) – *\*appointed January 2021*  
**Donna Todd Rivers** (*Dennis*) – *\*appointed January 2021*

**Joan Walsh Freedman** (*South Yarmouth*) – *\*completed term December 2020*  
**Lisa McNeill** (*Yarmouth Port*) – *\*completed term December 2020*  
**Lisa Malcolm** (*Osterville*) – *\*resigned March 2020*

## **PURPOSE**

The *Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women* was enacted by law and established in 2009 to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women.

The Commission is comprised of thirteen appointed women who have had prior experience working toward the improvement of the status of women. Commissioners are drawn from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, age, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds from throughout Cape Cod and the Islands.

The Commission is empowered to:

- Study, review, and report on the status of women on the Cape and Islands
- Inform leaders of business, education, health care, state and local governments and the communications media of issues pertaining to women
- Serve as a clearinghouse for information on issues pertaining to women
- Identify and recommend qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government, including boards and commissions
- Promote and facilitate collaboration among local women's commissions and among women's organizations in the state.

The commission meets ten times each year. It is expected that commissioners attend as many meetings as possible with absences over three requiring a conversation about cause. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month from September through June from 5:00-7:00 pm.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the *Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women* is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

## **GOALS FOR 2020-2021**

The Cape Cod and Islands Commission established three key goals: (1) To conduct a virtual listening circle for women of color in the CCICSW region to determine their needs and concerns; (2) To conduct an online survey to determine what the top issues and concerns are for women in the Cape Cod and Islands region; (3) To determine legislative priorities for advocacy on a regional and local level, and to prepare for the MCSW Advocacy Day

It was agreed that our three main workgroups would continue with their respective charges: (1) Hear more voices/reach more women; (2) Advocate for legislative issues; (3) Increased CCICSW visibility

The Commission agreed on the goals as listed below:

*Hearing More Voices/Reaching More Women:*

- Conduct a virtual listening circle for women of color in summer/fall 2020
- Conduct an online survey to determine the top issues and concerns for Cape/Islands women
- Compile testimony and discussion for reporting purposes

*Advocate for Legislative Issues:*

- Determine the state legislations related to the concerns of Cape/Islands women
- Follow implementation of legislation
- Explore actions at both state and local levels
- Keep CCICSW updated on legislative activity
- Attend MCSW Advocacy Day and meet with Cape and Islands legislators
- Host a virtual legislative brunch for CCICSW Commissioners and legislators

*Increase Visibility:*

- Create and maintain CCICSW publicity/media list
- Send out media releases and digital flyers for listening circle, survey, legislative brunch
- Send listening circle and survey reports to Cape and Islands legislators
- Maintain CCICSW Facebook page and explore other social media opportunities

## **MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

The membership ad-hoc committee - which consisted of Joan Freedman, Anna Dunphy, Mary Reardon Johnson, and Helen Bresnahan (emerita) - worked together to interview applicants to fill three vacancies. Three new Commissioners were appointed – Sue Mynttinen, Catarina Parache, Donna Todd Rivers (all of whom began their terms in January 2021). Each new Commissioner was assigned to a current Commissioner for individual orientation and mentoring.

## **WORKING GROUP SUMMARIES**

### ***Visibility***

The *Visibility* work group consisted of five Commissioners – Tina Games, Joan Freedman, Tara Wallace, Natalia Frois, and Sue Mynttinen – who spent the year following up on various opportunities related to keeping the work of the Commission in the public eye.

An introductory letter was written and sent to all state legislators, accompanying the fall listening circle and survey reports. A media release was also sent out announcing the launch of the winter survey.

In addition to promoting the listening circle and survey, the *Visibility* work group maintained the CCICSW Facebook page, posting articles and updates that pertained to the work of our Commission. Two other social media platforms were explored, Instagram and Twitter - with a goal of launching CCICSW pages during the summer of 2021.

## ***Legislative***

The *Legislative* working group spent the year following bills that pertained to the legislative priorities set by MCSW, as well as bills that directly affect women and girls on Cape Cod and the Islands. The workgroup recommended seven bills for consideration by CCICSW (listed below) which were discussed at our April 2021 meeting and approved by the full Commission.

CCICSW was represented at Advocacy Day (held virtually this year) by the following Commissioners: Mary Waygan, Tina Games, Sue Mynttinen, Anna Dunphy, Katia Dacunha, Tara Wallace, Catarina Parache – with Commissioners Waygan, Games, Mynttinen acting as co-hosts for the Bristol County/Cape Cod and Islands breakout group.

The *Legislative* workgroup consisted of seven Commissioners – Linda Cebula, Anna Dunphy, Lynda wan-N'Tani, Mary Waygan, Tara Wallace, Mary Reardon Johnson, Donna Todd Rivers (the latter joining the workgroup after being appointed in January).

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### **Legislative Workgroup Recommendations Approved by the Full Commission**

- No Cost Calls: An Act Relative to Inmate Telephone Calls SD.800
- End Child Marriage: An Act to End Child Marriage HD.718
- Natural Hairstyles: An Act prohibiting discrimination based on natural hairstyles HD.447
- The I Am Bill: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products HD.651/SD.748
- An Act Relative to Virtual Meetings Of Appointed Statewide Public Bodies HD.1300/SD.993
- The Common Start Bill: An Act Providing Affordable & Accessible High Quality Early Education & Care To Promote Child Development & Well-Being HD.1960/SD.1307
- The Family Mobility Act: An Act Relative to Work and Family Mobility HD.3012/SD2061

## ***Hearing More Voices/Reaching More Women***

The *Hearing More Voices* working group consisted of six Commissioners – Lisa McNeill, Lisa Malcolm, Katia Dacunha, Anna Dunphy, Natalia Frois, Lynda wan-N'Tani, Catarina Parache (the latter joining the workgroup after being appointed in January).

The role of the *Hearing More Voices/Reaching More Women* working group is to plan and implement programs, as outlined in the CCICSW Action Plan, which will allow CCICSW to meet more women and to hear and record their challenges, needs, and thoughts in order to support our mission of being a permanent and effective voice for women on Cape Cod and the Islands. Currently, this includes planning and holding Public Hearings and regional Listening Circles, conducting surveys, working with the Visibility working group to promote the events, and reporting on the events.

Below are two reports written by the working group and approved by the full Commission.

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**Cape and Islands Commission on the Status for Women**  
***Hearing More Voices:***  
***Listening Circle for Women of Color and Indigenous Women***  
**August 17, 2020**

**Planning/Background**

The Hearing More Voices/Reaching More Women Working Group is charged by the full CCICSW with two main goals: 1. “to meet women where they are” in order to gather feedback and input from a more demographically diverse representation of women (through small informal “Listening Circles” targeted at different segments of our community), and 2. to hold a formal Public Hearing every other year open to all women (representing the opposite years of MCSW’s Public Hearings).

In late winter/early Spring 2020, the Hearing More Voices/Reaching More Women Working Group started working on a Listening Circle to be held in Spring 2020 on Nantucket; these plans changed due to COVID19 which required the Listening Circle be held online (via the Zoom Platform). We further adjusted our planning with the backdrop of national dialogue and movement around social and racial justice. It was explored by the HVM WG to focus the Listening Circle on Women of Color during the summer (August), brought to the full Commission for discussion, and approved at the June 10 Commission meeting.

The original planning group included, Katia Regina Dacunha, Lisa Malcolm, Lisa McNeill, and Natalia Frois. This group planned the general format of the Listening Circles and began working to implement the plan. Tasks were split up as the Working Group made plans for logistics (Zoom), promotion, format of the Listening Circle, and who would speak. In July/August, three additional Commissioners volunteered on the HVM WG for the August Listening Circle: Tara Vargas Wallace, Mary Waygan, and Lynda wan-N’Tani.

As agreed at the July Commission meeting, the CCICSW’s second Listening Circle was planned for Women of Color, and we added to the title “and Indigenous Women” at the recommendation. It was agreed that we would offer three Breakout Zoom Rooms for English, Spanish and Portuguese speakers. Flyers, invitations and announcements were in all three languages and went out on Facebook, email, to elected officials, to media outlets, and on various email networks. Independence House, the Cape and Islands regional domestic violence organization, co-sponsored this event.

Registration was done through Zoom, and women were required to register in advance (to provide for meeting security of the online meeting). Women wanting to attend emailed [CCICSWInfo@gmail.com](mailto:CCICSWInfo@gmail.com), and a Zoom link was emailed to them so that they could register on Zoom. Twenty-one (21) women registered in advance, and sixteen (16) attended, along with eight (8) Commissioners. Some women may have had trouble logging on to the Zoom platform, and Katia Regina Dacunha agreed to follow up with them.

### **Introduction to Women of Color & Indigenous Women Listening Circle on Zoom**

Commissioners in Attendance: Katia Regina Dacunha, Natalia Frois, Lisa Malcolm, Lisa McNeill, Tara Vargas Wallace, Mary Waygan, Lynda wan-N'Tani and Joan Walsh-Freedman

In addition to the commissioners, sixteen (16) women zoomed into the listening session.

Commissioners Tara Vargas Wallace, Natalia Frois, and Katia Regina Dacunha opened the listening session and addressed attendees in English, Spanish and Portuguese respectively with the following statement: The Cape and Islands Commission on the Status for Women exists to advance women toward full equality and to promote opportunities for all women. 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 Commission's duties include: studying, reviewing and reporting on the status of women on the Cape and Islands, promoting and facilitating collaboration among local women's organizations, recommending policies that benefit women to agencies, officers of the state and local government and holding fact-finding hearings and other public forums as it may deem necessary. Applications are welcomed from individuals residing in Barnstable, Dukes, or Nantucket counties with experience in issues pertaining to women.

Commissioner Tara Vargas Wallace announced that the listening session would be recorded and advised any attendees wanting to remain anonymous to turn off their video and remove their name from their image. (Recording began.)

Commissioner Tara Vargas Wallace acknowledged the sessions are being held in three languages, and took this opportunity to acknowledge that the hearing was being held on Cape Cod, the land of the Wampanoag People, and that the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe has revitalized their native language. Danielle Tobey, a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, thanked Commissioner Vargas Wallace for acknowledging the Wampanoag People and stated "We are still here".

Each commissioner and most participants introduced themselves. Participants represented the following: graduate student in education; Chair of a Town Inclusion and Diversity Committee; educators; mother & business owner; social justice advocates; attorney practicing family law; Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal member; child case manager; domestic violence victim advocate; poet; union organizer; union negotiator; and social justice activists.

The listening session broke out into two meeting rooms, one conducted in Portuguese and the other in English. (The Spanish speaker(s) felt comfortable attending the English language break out session.)

### **English Language Breakout Room**

The following topics of concern were raised: the impacts due to the spread of the new coronavirus COVID-19, domestic violence and abuse, affordable housing, education, childcare, and citizen participation.

#### COVID-19

JM stated that the spread of the COVID-19 has had major impact on her and her family. The virus has closed down her business, and she is conflicted on whether to send her children to school or keep them home.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

MY: An attorney practicing in family law, MY testified that domestic violence is a concern, exacerbated by the cost and limited accessibility of legal services for victims. MY testified on the obstacles to securing a restraining order, noting with concern that women of color have more barriers to securing a restraining order than white women. For example, white women are seen as victims, but domestic abuse is seen as a cultural norm for women of color. It was her experience that local Police play a pivotal role in this process while in the field responding to an incident of domestic violence, that the Police make the decision in the field whether abuse has occurred, and if the Police Officer does not decide that abuse has occurred a restraining order is not issued at that time. This is a barrier to securing a restraining order. It is also her experience that Police officers in the field lack the understanding on the definition of abuse and that without her advocacy in the field, and insistence that a judge be contacted, Police will not determine abuse has occurred and no restraining order would have been secured.

MY also testified the Police instruct victims to contact a judge in the morning to obtain a restraining order, however, victims are at high risk after contacting the Police and may be at grave danger if forced to wait for a restraining order.

MY further testified these obstacles are more present in the Town of Yarmouth and in more diverse communities. After meeting with the Police Chief in Orleans on how to lodge a complaint against an officer, she understood the process to be lengthy and ineffective, and that Police have strong immunity.

MY stated there is a need for:

1. a network of pro-bono attorneys available to advocate for victims in the field to ensure a Police Officer will act and issue the restraining order
2. a requirement that Police Officers consult with the victim's attorney or the on-call judge in determining if abuse has occurred
3. Victims of domestic violence should have a guaranteed access to a public attorney

MY noted that a parent may actually lose the custody of their children if you do not secure a restraining order or if they enter in a homeless shelter.

DT: Testified that domestic violence is a concern. Due to the inability of the justice system to effectively enforce a restraining order against her abuser, DT was forced to move away from her birthplace of Cape Cod. Her ex-partner would violate the restraining order by breaking into her home to eat and shower. DT noted it is not just the Police that fail to protect but also the courts; in her case the judge would not issue a restraining order for the children "because he is not abusing the children, just you". DT noted this is a problem as domestic violence impacts the entire family.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

JM: testified that she has experienced housing discrimination, and that there is a severe lack of housing inventory and affordable housing. This lack of housing inventory causes people to lose their (rental) voucher. JM identified domestic violence as a concern and a barrier to housing.

TI: TI likewise testified housing discrimination exists. While working with a realtor, she was shown only run-down places and was not shown any high-quality units even though she could afford the higher quality unit.

## CHILDCARE

LW: Childcare is an important issue for families. Loss of childcare voucher happens due to trivial reasons. LW also noted that childcare facilities run by women of color, and facilities which serve a diverse population, experience more difficulties with respect to permitting, licensing or securing grants than other facilities.

## EDUCATION

DT: DT testified that the local school curriculum is not culturally diverse. As a girl she experienced a feeling of not belonging, and her children while on Cape Cod “survived not thrived” in school. This is in sharp contrast, the schools in Los Angeles have diversity in their educational programs and her children thrived.

M: Testified that COVID-19 has posed a unique burden on children with special needs.

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

MS: wanted to promote networking with diversity resources and groups.

NJ: NJ testified that women of color are not represented (in leadership positions) and noted women should be encouraged to join local boards and committees.

The session in English ended with all participants being encouraged to maintain their involvement with the Commission on the Status of Women, join a board or committee of their local government, complete their Census, and to vote. There was concern over the public’s confusion over voting this fall, and participants were encouraged to direct questions or concerns regarding voting to their local Town Hall.

## **Portuguese Language Breakout Room**

Commissioners Natalia Frois and Katia Dacunha present and participant JF. (Other Portuguese-speaking registrants seemed to have trouble signing on to the Zoom meeting; we will follow up with them.)

In the Portuguese session we had one attendee, JF. She mentioned that in Brazil where she came from she was an architect. She wishes she could get her license as an architect here in USA so she could continue her profession. She mentioned that she has been very welcomed by Americans and treated well, she thinks that there is discrimination between women to women. She has experienced discrimination in commercial spaces, in stores, otherwise she has been treated well in the public sector in MA.



Through COVID19 she had to work less because her daughter's pre-school program was only approved until 3:30pm so her income dropped.

She mentioned that support for more single mothers getting an education can improve their career and financial status. Supporting single mothers through education can prevent them from falling into addiction.

The necessity to go to school to improve her income is essential to her. Having two kids and earning \$15 an hour in cleaning is not enough. It's very challenging to maintain 2 kids on a low income. Having support for single mothers to go back to school will give them an opportunity to improve their income and invest more in her children's education. The challenges to go back to school are financial support to pay for childcare and school tuition.

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## **Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women**

### ***2021 Survey Summary***

The *Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women (CCICSW)* recently conducted our second survey of challenges and needs of women on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

Survey responses were collected between October 2020 and March 2021 using the online survey tool *Survey Monkey*. It consisted of 18 questions – some multiple choice, some ranking an order of preference, and some open-ended.

The survey was distributed through various networks that included nonprofit organizations that serve women, government agencies in each of the 15 Cape Cod towns as well as the six towns of Martha's Vineyard and the island of Nantucket, the two federally-recognized tribal nations of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Wampanoag and Mashpee Wampanoag, churches and religious groups.

The survey was designed to assess the challenges that women are facing in our region. Here is a quick overview of the information we gathered from the survey:

- There were 454 individuals who responded, representing all 15 Cape Cod towns, the six towns of Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.
- The age of respondents ranged from 18 to over 60 years old – with the majority falling between the age category of 60 and older (36%).
- Self-identifying questions showed a variety of ethnic backgrounds, marital status, sexual orientation, military service, and included parents, grandparents, and non-parents.
- Topics of concern by respondents (in order of frequency) included healthcare, mental health, affordable housing, cost of/access to medication, education/vocational training, reproductive rights, childcare, workplace challenges, and addiction.

The results of this survey will be used by CCICSW to guide advocacy, programming, and legislative priorities for the Commission over the next two years. Additionally, we are sharing the data publicly to provide information for other organizations advocating for the women and girls living on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

Notably, the results of this 2021 survey align and differ in a few key areas from our 2017 survey. Differences may reflect changes in priorities of the women of the Cape and Islands but may also be a product of updates made to the phrasing of the survey. Healthcare and housing remain as the two top priorities for women in our region. Mental health was not listed as a separate priority in the 2017 survey but was selected by 45% of respondents in the 2021 survey. Employment ranked as the third most cited priority in 2017, but employment related concerns did not rank in the top five priorities in the 2021 survey. This result is surprising given the current global pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, but in the 2021 survey, respondents were able to narrow their concerns from 'Employment' to more nuanced concerns such as 'Unemployment' and 'Workplace Challenge' perhaps diluting the frequency of responses.

While the survey represents our second effort at large-scale data collection, we do recognize limitations to our survey methods. First, responses came from women with access to (and the ability to manage) technology. Second, we were not able to provide the survey in other languages but have begun to secure funding for that service in the future. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the number of women we were able to reach as well as our ability for outreach to certain populations of women on Cape Cod and the Islands. In future surveys, the Commission is dedicated to soliciting responses from all women, including those with housing and financial insecurity as well as linguistically diverse populations. Our hope is to continue to expand our awareness through hearings, listening circles, and the creation of other outreach tools in order to better sample all of the women in our region.

*\*For more information regarding this annual report, please contact: CCICSWinfo@gmail.com*