

Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

Dawn Forbes DiStefano
Michelle Goncalves
Patricia Hallberg

Gabrielle Jackson
Tara Marshall
Jennifer Metsch

Lizzy Ortiz
Shanique Spalding

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Members

Dawn Forbes DiStefano – West Springfield
Michelle Goncalves – Ludlow
Patricia Hallberg – Wilbraham
Gabrielle Jackson – Springfield
Tara Marshall – Feeding Hills
Jennifer Metsch – Longmeadow
Lizzy Ortiz – Springfield
Shanique Spalding – Springfield

Elected Officers

Dawn Forbes DiStefano – Chair
Patricia Hallberg – Vice Chair
Michelle Goncalves – Secretary

Purpose

On April 25, 2017, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women inaugurated nine (9) new commissioners to a newly formed regional commission created to study and report on the status of women and girls in the 23 towns and cities that make up Hampden County, Massachusetts. “The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is a state-established body charged with reviewing the status of women in Massachusetts and offering recommendations regarding policy that would improve access to opportunities and equality.” The unfunded Regional Commissions “were legislatively created to study and report on the status of women and girls in their geographical areas, and to provide permanent and effective voices for women and girls. Each county and regional commission reports their findings annual to MCSW.”

Membership

At the July 11, 2019 meeting, the Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (HCCSWG) voted for three (3) elected officers at which time the following assignments were accepted – Dawn Forbes DiStefano, Chair (2nd term); Patricia Hallberg, Vice Chair (1st term); Michelle Goncalves (2nd term). HCCSWG Commissioners Nicole Murray, Ellen Moorhouse, and Mary Beth Ogulewicz issued resignations in May, June, and September 2019 respectively. HCCSWG Commissioner Shaitia Spruell provided her resignation in October 2019 in order to accept an appointment to the MCSW. In January 2020, the HCCSWG welcomed the following new Commissioners – Gabrielle Jackson, Tara Marshall, Barbara McKenzie and Lizzy Ortiz. Unfortunately, Barbara McKenzie issued her resignation prior to her swearing in due to illness. Since June 2019, HCCSWG Commissioners have engaged in eight (8) public meetings and worked with the MCSW to support a Western Massachusetts public hearing in Springfield

in February 2020. HCCSWG Commissioners have worked closely with the MCSW by participating in Regional Convenings, Advocacy Days, and several virtual informational sessions.

Accomplishments

The HCCSWG engaged in a wide variety of community learning events, as well as advocacy efforts on behalf of women and girls. To make ourselves more accessible to constituents, we implemented a series of standing meeting locations across the county (Palmer, Westfield, Holyoke, and Springfield). Our Commission also continued to have a vibrant and dynamic social media presence offering daily Facebook posts and updates about issues impacting women and girls. In addition, the social media posts supported events specifically focused on women and girls leading to increased awareness of the Commission and followers. In April 2020, the HCCSWG officially voted on a Social Media Policy. In addition, the Commission continued to identify local efforts in research, policy and legislation reflecting information and needs shared by constituents.

- Investing in Girls Alliance (IGA) – The HCCSWG has initiated efforts to replicate the Worcester-based Investing in Girls Alliance for the Hampden County area. Mary McRae was a guest speaker at the September and October 2019 HCCSWG public meetings sharing the history, expertise and successes of the IGA. The HCCSWG believes it has a role in serving as a catalyst and convener of agencies focused on girls' needs in our area. Similar to IGA, HCCSWG is working to bring agencies together to develop a collaboration designed to collect data, advocate for policy change and provide community training – all leading to improved conditions for girls.
- Legislative Advocacy – HCCSWG Commissioners took an active role in advocating and supporting legislation aligned with the MCSW agenda. In particular, Commissioners communicated and worked to support efforts for the Healthy Youth Act, Affordable Childcare Bill and Sexual Harassment and Education Legislation.
- 413Cares – HCCSWG Commissioners supported the regional implementation of the 413Cares website by serving on the local advisory board and recruiting local agencies to participate. The 413Cares website serves as a platform for services and resources needed to address basic needs crises (food, shelter, clothing), behavior and mental health services, housing, childcare and employment supports.
- Women @ Work – HCCSWG Commissioners supported the newly formed Women @ Work working group. This group focuses on supporting local events geared towards raising funds and awareness to improve the lives of women.
- Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts – HCCSWG Commissioners participated on the Advisory Committee working to complete the Status of Women and Girls Report 2019. In November 2019, HCCSWG hosted a public meeting for a community listening event related to the report.
- 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) – HCCSWG Commissioners assisted in the research and dissemination of the 2019 CHNA with specific focus on areas related to women and girls including maternal/child health, preventative care, chronic disease and domestic violence.
- Coffee Hours with Commissioners – To further engage with Hampden County residents and raise awareness about the Commission's work, HCCSWG initiated a series of online coffee hour listening sessions this year. Particularly during the COVID19 pandemic when physical interaction was limited, these sessions allowed HCCSWG to advocate for Hampden County women and girls, collect feedback from residents, and help promote activities and initiatives that support our community.

- Hampden County COVID19 Survey – HCCSWG created and distributed a survey designed to gather information about the impact of COVID19 on women and girls in Hampden County. Survey results should be available next fiscal year.

Local Committees and Advisory Board Memberships (HCCSWG Commissioner Representation)

- Businesses Against Human Trafficking
- Dress for Success of Western Massachusetts