



Hampshire Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

Annual Report 2022

Commissioners: Marcia Plant Jackson Chair, (Leverett); Laura Sylvester Vice Chair (Shutesbury); Victoria Cliche Clerk, (Leverett); Bonnie MacCracken Treasurer (Amherst); Marie McCourt, (Granby); Jennifer Ortiz (S. Hadley).

Mission

The purpose of the Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (HFCSWG) shall be to advance women and girls toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote the rights and opportunities for all women and girls. The mission of the Commission on the Status of Women and Girls is to amplify the voices of women and girls (being all those who self-identify as such, regardless of the gender they were designated at birth) across Hampshire-Franklin Counties that facilitates and fosters community, inclusiveness, and well-being for women and girls. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women and girls across all lifespans.

Advocacy

Franklin and Hampshire Counties are among the poorest in Massachusetts. Although there is great rural beauty, resources and work opportunities are limited and contribute to poverty and desolation. Many towns lack internet and /or cell phone access as well as sufficient access to public transportation as it is greatly limited. Even as the pandemic seems to be waning, our Commission continues to be engaged with the problems of food insecurity, access to social services, and poverty more generally. We have testified in support of a bill relating to the 'cliff effect' protecting families on the poverty line from losing crucial benefits if they make a small amount of money that pushes them over the poverty line. We have testified in support of another bill allowing spouses to be compensated as Personal Care Attendants when a partner is ill or disabled. We have also spoken out about free meals for all students and making SNAP benefits available to college students.

Programming

Focus on Food Insecurity: Bringing on the ground resources and legislators together

In June 2021, we held a virtual public hearing on the issues of food insecurity with presentations by Carleen Basler of the Amherst Survival Center and Kristen Levitt, Director of Stone Soup in Greenfield. The guests shared their understanding of and information on the current state of affairs regarding need and the services and means their organizations use to remediate the challenges in area.

The hearing was attended by local state representatives: Natalie Blais, 1st Franklin, Mindy Domb, 3rd Hampshire, Jake Oliveria, 7th Hampshire and Lindsay Sabadosa, 1st Hampshire and State Senator Jo Comerford.

Discussion between the parties was fruitful in regard to increasing understanding on the part of the Commission, local organizations and legislators as to need (per different lenses of those participating), what is being done by all parties and what additional actions are in progress or might be initiated.

We plan to hold a hearing on the topic at least annually, offering our support and advocacy for legislation on this issue that can mutually benefit our constituents.

Social Change & Community Engagement – An Exchange with Smithies

In June 2022, we held a virtual public hearing with Smith College Students from the Jandon Center for Community Engagement on the topic of Social Change and Community engagement. The hearing served three purposes:

- 1) To expand the Commissions understanding of a broader set of community issues, especially those of interest to younger adults in the area – whether local residents or students from outside the local area.
- 2) To expose students to the power of working with their state legislators.
- 3) To create a meaningful experience for our intern which was to take a learn role in organizing and conducting a hearing.

Critical to the success of the hearing was participation by Mindy Domb, Representative 3rd Hampshire.

Student organizers and Jandon Center Experiential Learning Coordinator Madeleine DelVicario (on behalf to students unable to attend), reported on work conducted on nine separate initiatives in collaboration with local community organizations and non-profits addressing a variety of local needs as follows:

1. Conducting research on the kinds of services the community would like to see at the Northampton Resilience Hub.
2. Working to ensure financial and volunteer support to the Friends of Hampshire Country which provides shelter for those experiencing homelessness.

3. Working to be able to more easily collect and distribute books to inmates.
4. Supporting refugee resettlement by making connections between the Jandon Center and organizations that serve refugees and their resettlement in hopes of finding roles for students to support refugees.
5. Conducting robotics workshops for children who would not otherwise be exposed to the field and its underlying components (the logic of coding, circuits and engineering).
6. The creation of a TransHealth Resource map in collaboration with TransHealth Northampton.
7. Working in collaboration with Families for Justice as Healing & Building Up People Not Prisons on a campaign against the building of a Woman's prison and support for a moratorium on the building of any prison in MA in the next five years by collecting signatures and staging a protest.
8. Creating signage (welcome sign, road signs, garden signs and 60 bilingual crop markers) and connecting additional resources for Riquezas del Campo farm in Hatfield.
9. Working with Thirty Birds, an organization that helps Afghani refugees, to support 50 Afghan girls seeking relocation in Canada but stuck in Pakistan feel supported per current challenges.

We hope to continue this collaboration with the Jandon Center, and to reach out to similar programs in the Pioneer Valley to increase our outreach, especially reaching a younger group of women who may wish to join the commission in the future.

Community Resource Guide

In 2019 our commission compiled a local area resource guide to help women with a wide variety of needs including finding healthcare, legal, financial, mental health, etc. The guide was internet based, meaning only women with access to computers and the internet, could access it.

This year, we updated the guide and are making it available on line and in print so as to be able to distribute it at appropriate public gatherings and locations that will reach those who may need it most. We plan to keep this information updated and accessible.

Goals for the next fiscal year:

1. First and foremost, we plan to continue to recruit new members. We stand at six members having recruited two in 2021 and two in 2022 but having lost a total of five commissioners between those two years due primarily to terms expiring. Our goal is to have a full Commission with 9 members. We plan to focus on and continue to improve our outreach.

2. Increase our social media presence by establishing and filling a Social Media Internship with a student interested in communications and/or marketing and assigning a Commission to act as a mentor and support.
3. Continue to build strong local partnerships where mutual goals are furthered. Specifically continue to build upon the relationship established with Smith College and identify one additional partnership.
4. Build even stronger partnership with State Legislators and leverage those relationships to support community change.
5. In collaboration with community partners, create a sense of culture of kinship, promoting rights and opportunities for all women and girls through virtual and in person events.

Submitted by Marcia Plant-Jackson and Victoria Cliché
May 25, 2022