



Executive Board

Bonnie MacCracken, Chair
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Francia Wisniewski, Treasurer
Wendy Dagle, Clerk

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Denise Brown
Ginetta E.B. Candelario
Marcia Plant Jackson

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Marianne Bullock
Chelsea Kline
Keleigh Pereira



Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

Annual Report (2019-2020)

***“It always feels nice to be associated with a team
you share a great bond with.” (Anushka Shetty)***

Over the course of the 2019-2020 year, the Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (HFCSWG) continued to work within their district expanding the public discussion of gender-based inequality in Western Massachusetts. During the year HFCSWG continued meeting with local legislators and their staff to discuss the issues that impacted the women and girls in their district, as well as the Massachusetts State Commission’s legislative priorities. This Annual Report (covering the period of July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020) highlights many of the accomplishments that were made.

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.

Goals for 2020-2021

The goals we set for ourselves, each year, are defined by our mission statement. We continually strive and set goals to amplify the voices of women and girls in our district. HFCSWG will discuss and set goals for the upcoming 2020-2021 fiscal year during their annual retreat scheduled for August. During their retreat, the commissioners will define their goals, examine their structure, plan advocacy events, and schedule meetings for the next twelve months, including a celebration for International Women’s Day. We are looking forward to:

1. Election of officers.
2. Recruiting a full slate of commissioners and planning for ongoing attrition as the terms of the inaugural class of commissioners come to an end.
3. Reviewing our bylaws.
4. Determining ways to continually create a sense of culture and ways for promoting the rights and opportunities for all women and girls amid this period of social/physical distancing.



Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

From the Chair:

The Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls is a catalyst for positive change through advocacy, education, and collaboration. We represent a diverse geographic region in Western Massachusetts, our district is comprised of 46 municipalities.

The U. S. Census Bureau reports that we have about 161,000 people residing in Hampshire County and 70,000 residents residing in Franklin County. My sister commissioners, and the women and girls residing in this district, represent 53.3% of the population in Hampshire County and 51.5% of the population in Franklin County. Women represent the majority, yet we continued to struggle to achieve full equity in all areas of our lives.

Franklin County is the poorest county in Massachusetts. The public transportation system in the HFCSWG district is limited. Buses do not extend into our hilltown regions or western portions of these two counties, neither is Ware connected to Amherst, or New Salem to Orange, by public transportation.

Lack of public transportation hinders our access to food, childcare, housing, jobs, and medical care. It is not only the lack of reliable public transportation that is stifling women from achieving full equity it is also our limited access to high-speed internet. The lack of public transportation and the internet is a twofold blow that is setting this district up to fall further behind.

I spoke about the lack of high-speed internet in this district during the most recent MCSW Semi-Annual Regional Convening, held in Worcester. Many commissioners in attendance, were astonished to learn that there were women and girls, living only a short drive from where they were sitting, with no access to the internet. The lack of internet in this region is creating a larger pay gap by blocking women and girls from furthering their education and applying for jobs. The lack of high-speed internet is also affecting HFCSWG's ability to facilitate and foster community, inclusiveness, and well-being for women and girls throughout our entire region.

During HFCSWG's community conversation on domestic violence with the local domestic violence advocacy organization, Safe Passage, we learned how vital it was for domestic violence victims, living in rural areas, to have access to online resources. Commissioner Jackson has also talked about how medical professionals are now practicing more telemedicine, yet the Community Health Center where she works, in Worthington, has no internet access. Also, Commissioner Mack, who is also a Clinical Social Worker, reports that many children and families are unable to receive telehealth therapy services throughout the area because they lack access to affordable and reliable internet services.



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As we retreated into quarantine in March, young girls began to fall further behind their peers living in other districts because without high-speed internet our rural schools lack the tools for providing quality online educational opportunities. Our children are unable to learn and women are unable to telework from home.

Recently, the Recorder, a daily newspaper covering Franklin County, did an article about how Franklin County residents are struggling without broadband and reported people are sitting in their parked cars in municipal parking lots because this is the only place in their community where they can gain access to the internet. With libraries and community workspaces shuttered, parking lots have become the only option for many to social distance, telework, take online classes, and even filing their unemployment claims. With the growing unemployment and slowing economy, I fear that many households are choosing between having internet or paying for groceries, widening the educational and equity gap further in our district. We are concerned that we will never be able to close this gap without MCSW and our legislators prioritizing this as a women's issue that needs to be immediately addressed.

Now I like to introduce you to the team, the HFCSWG Commissioners, the women I share a great bond with. In each of our biographical introductions, attached to this annual report, we tell her story, including events we participated in and our accomplishments as HFCSWG Commissioners.

Be well, be safe.

Respectfully submitted by
Bonnie MacCracken, Chair
Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls
June 8, 2020



Meet the Commission:

Denise Brown, M.S., CIM., Commissioner

Denise Brown, B.S., MS., CIM, PhD student (Capella University), native of Holyoke, MA, graduated from Bay Path University-One-Day- A-Week Program with B.S. in Business Administration-concentration in Executive Management and a M.S. in Communication and Information Management. She is currently on her journey of pursuing her terminal degree from Capella University in Higher Education -Leadership and currently enrolled at Bay Path University's -Online Teaching Certificate Program.

Denise was most recently appointed and sworn in to serve a second three-year term to serve as Commissioner for the Status of Women and Girls in the Hampshire/Franklin County. Denise currently serves as adjunct professor at Springfield College and teaches in several disciplines. She served as the content developer to the African American history course and professor.

Her work in the Hampshire/Franklin county commission is inclusive of serving as the co-chair to the Sojourner Truth's legacy for fighting for Women's Suffrage is honored and lifted as part of the pathway to ensure ALL people especially Women of Color have protected access to the VOTE and the significant role in our democracy." Denise remains a facilitator for Salary Negotiation Workshops for Women in the Hampshire /Franklin County for the AAUW Work Smart initiative. She most recently joined partnership with Coppedge Consulting Company, where she will serve as the primary Cultural Humility Consultant to the Hampshire/Franklin County for the Coppedge Consulting.

Denise is a forward thinker who is compassionate and passionate. She is committed to Social Justice and Equality for Women and Girls of Color in particular for African-American Women and Girls, part of her doctoral research is focused on improving policies and practices associated with juvenile justice, educational and socioeconomic conditions for Black girls, women and their families.

Wendy Dagle, Clerk, Hampshire County

Wendy lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Wendy has a Master's degree in Public Policy & Administration from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her professional work has revolved around Massachusetts foster care and she has worked as the Director for Placement Services at Multicultural Community Services in Springfield for the last 5 years. She also serves on the Board of the Massachusetts Council on Adult Foster Care, providing professional leadership, knowledge, and legislative advocacy to provider agencies across the state.

Wendy has been with the Commission for just under a year and is currently serving as the Clerk and on the communications committee. Wendy actively attends monthly



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meetings and this year participated in this commission's annual retreat, the Pioneer Valley Women's Day March in Springfield and meetings with a few of Western Massachusetts' heroines including Senator Joe Commerford, Attorney Tahirah Amatul-Wadud and Ammy Cronin (Safe Passage). Most recently she designed a pamphlet for the Hampshire/Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. After a lot of learning, Wendy is excited to become a more active and visible Commissioner in the next coming year.

Ginetta E. B. Candelario, Commissioner, Hampshire County

Ginetta Candelario is Professor of Sociology, Latin American & Latina/o Studies and the Study of Women & Gender at Smith College. She has also been engaged in Community Based Learning and Research with Holyoke non-profit organizations since 2009.

In addition to being Editor of the scholarly journal *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* housed at Smith and published by Duke University Press, she is author of, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Identity From Museums to Beauty Shops* (Duke University Press in 2007) which received awards from the Latino Studies Section of the Latin American Studies Association and the New England Council of Latin American Studies. Her edited volume, *Miradas desencadenantes: Los estudios de género en la República Dominicana al inicio del tercer milenio*, the first collection of gender and women's studies research in the Dominican Republic, was published in April of 2005 by FLACSO and INTEC. She also co-edited a two-volume primary documents collection for the Dominican Republic's Archivo General de la Nación, *Cien Años de feminismo dominicanos, 1861-1961*, published in 2016. Her current book project is tentatively titled *Voices Echoing Beyond the Seas: Dominican Feminisms from Transatlantic to Transnational, 1882-1942*.

Finally, Ginetta is married to Timothy J. Seney and the proud mother of two adult children, Marlena (who is part of the Teach for America Corps in North Carolina) and Christian Candelario Romero (who will be continuing his college education in Massachusetts).

Marcia Plant Jackson, MSN, MPA, RN, FNP-C, Franklin County

Marcia moved to Leverett in the Pioneer Valley 5 years ago. She has been a nurse and Nurse Practitioner for more than 30 years. Her professional life has been dedicated to working with the underserved, the uninsured, and the disenfranchised. She founded a transition program for people with mental illness who were being released from hospitals with little programming to follow them. She started a neighborhood clinic in an inner-city high school in Indianapolis for people with no insurance where she remained



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for eleven years. She works as a Nurse Practitioner at both the Community Health Center of Franklin County and Hilltown Health Center.

She is an inaugural member of this commission. She has focused her attention on access to healthcare issues, and is a Member of Western Mass Medicare for All. She attends many of their meetings, representing the commission. She has attending office hours with Reps. Sabadosa and Blais, and attended forums chaired by Sen. Comerford. She has attended advocacy day in Boston, and a Voting Rights event in Greenfield. She marched in the Pride parade in Northampton. Through her affiliation with the health center in Greenfield she has hosted many of the Commission meetings.

Marcia published an opinion piece in the Hampshire Gazette on May 26, 2020 in response to a column by a local physician who downplayed the Covid-19 pandemic by comparing it to the seasonal flu, as he discussed numbers and percentages. In her piece 'The Human Experience Behind Covid' Marcia portrayed the human face and cost of the disease.

Bonnie MacCracken, Chair, Hampshire County

Bonnie, an inaugural member of the Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (HFCSWG), brings to the commission her entrepreneurship and organizational leadership skills. Her organizational leadership skills were honed during her own campaigns, assisting other political candidates, and while attending the Women's Campaign School at Yale and the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact (LIPPI).

She has dedicated over 12 years to public service and leadership on issues of housing insecurity and on community nonprofit boards. She works pro bono with Massachusetts Alliance Against Predatory Lending with foreclosed homeowners, drafting policy, and reviewing foreclosure documents. In 2012, she drafted and successfully lobbied for an amendment to the Massachusetts Homestead Act to protect deployed Massachusetts servicemembers from the foreclosure of their homes. This amendment passed under the Valor Act of 2012.

Bonnie has served on the executive committee of the HFCSWG for three years, one term as treasurer and two as chair. As Chair, her goals were to increase the visibility and programming. This past November, she spoke about the history and mission of the HFCSWG before the membership of the Petersham Unitarian Church.

She worked with the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts coordinating a co-hosted community listening session to present the *Key Findings on the Status of Women and Girls in Western Mass in 2019*. During the year, Bonnie also coordinated a community conversation on domestic violence with Safe Passage, as well as monthly commission



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meetings. She joined Commissioner Mack at the Ware domestic violence awareness walk and walked with Commissioner Dagle at the Pioneer Valley Women's March.

Bonnie recently closed her thirty-year land title research firm and began a new career working in the Realty Management Division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She resides in Amherst with her family.

Linda-Jeanne Mack, LICSW, Vice-Chair, Hampshire County

Linda-Jeanne is a resident of Easthampton and an inaugural member of the Hampshire Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls and was appointed in 2017. She served her first year as Clerk and then has served as the Vice-Chair since July of 2019. During this past year, Linda-Jeanne has been active in a variety of community activities on behalf of the commission. Some highlights for her this year include the Ware Domestic Violence Awareness Walk and the Western Mass Women's Fund Forum event where the Commission shared the results of the Women's Fund Status of Women and Girls report that Linda-Jeanne was on the advisory board for in Spring of 2019. Most recently, she moderated a Girls Initiative "What's Your Status" session for the state commission.

In addition to her community activism with the Commission, Linda-Jeanne serves on several advisory boards and tasks forces regarding child welfare, violence against women and other human rights causes. Throughout the COVID19 stay at home order, she has proudly volunteered weekly in Hampshire County at the Not Bread Alone community meal kitchen in Amherst.

By day, Linda-Jeanne is the Director of the Adoption Services program at 18 Degrees, which serves children and families involved with the foster care system in Massachusetts. Her program works to ensure children can go home safely to their family of origin and looks to provide other options for permanent adoptive homes if that can't happen. As a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, Linda-Jeanne sees a small caseload of clients for therapy at one of the community mental health clinics in Northampton. She also teaches multiple courses for the Social Work department at Western New England University.



Francia Wisnewski, Treasurer, Franklin County

Francia, and immigrant who grew up in Cali, Colombia and a twenty-year resident of Franklin County. Francia holds a Bachelor's Degree in teaching sciences from Universidad Del Valle in Cali, Colombia and a Master's degree in Education from the University of Massachusetts.

She has been a tireless advocate for children, families, women and individuals. She works as an Associate Director of Programs for Raising A Reader MA in the Pioneer Valley, focusing her work in supporting school readiness success. She has worked for local nonprofit anti-poverty organizations throughout the years and she continues to volunteer her services in various community initiatives, specially amplifying the voices of women and girls.

Francia is serving in her second term and was our first Chair who supported the establishment of our regional commission. During her tenure as chair, she led the process of writing our bylaws, supervised and collaborated with our first intern, producing our first resource guide that identifies organizations in the region that supports women and girls. With her ability to network and skills to be a connector, she has participated in legislative breakfasts, local chamber of commerce breakfast and represented the commission as a speaker during two consecutive Advocacy Days sponsored by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW).

In November of 2019, Commissioner Wisnewski was nominated by both her legislator and her Senator as one of local advocates with the Latin X Excellence in the Hill, this award was presented at the State House, supported by Speaker DeLeo and Senator Spilka. The event was sponsored by the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and recognizing local leadership of black and Latinx individuals to better policies in the commonwealth.

Francia carries other critical leadership positions, our current Treasurer is representing the community as an elected town meeting member, Montague Finance Committee Member. She also serves on the boards of the SHEA Theater and Leadership Pioneer Valley. Before moving to Montague, she served two terms on the City Greenfield's School Committee, including two terms as Vice-Chair. Francia is an accomplished ultra-running in support of local philanthropy.