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PRESS RELEASE
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COVID 19 EXACERBATES INEQUITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN
Study Released by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

BOSTON, MA. - The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has released a report on “The Impact of COVID-19 and Related Policy on Massachusetts Women and Girls.” The Report includes key findings and areas for immediate attention in the following categories:

- The Economic/Financial Impact
- Health Issues
- Essential Workers on the Front Lines
- Domestic Violence
- Risks Facing Incarcerated Women

“The inequities and challenges women deal with on a regular basis have been exacerbated by this pandemic. In too many cases it has cut women and girls off from, or limited access to important resources and networks that provide support to them, their families and their communities, causing a devastating ripple effect,” said Jill Ashton, Executive Director, CSW.

Data for the report came from a public hearing with over 100 participants, and 2523 survey responses from women and girls in over 250 towns and cities across the Commonwealth.

HEARING: On Thursday, April 2 the Commission convened a virtual public hearing with more than 100 attendees. Testimony was shared verbally and in writing. Testimony indicates:

- A significant increase in domestic violence incidents
- Pregnant women fear having to deliver their babies alone
- Incarcerated women are at risk due to a lack of social distancing in prisons
- Elder residents have been dangerously and increasingly more isolated
- Youth are cut off from essential support programs
- Financial insecurity from loss of income, and childcare
- Food insecurity and a lack of information about accessing financial resources

CSW Chair Nina Kimball said “The testimony at the hearing was very powerful, particularly about the challenges faced by women of color who are especially vulnerable - whether it is incarcerated women who cannot engage in social distancing and are lacking necessities like soap, sanitizer, and toilet paper, or the immigrant community experiencing misinformation due to language barriers, or low-income women whose limited access to resources has been compounded by this crisis.”

SURVEY: Immediately following the hearing, the Commission launched an online survey using social media and email 4/3/20-4/9/20. It was completed by 2,523 Massachusetts residents from more than 250 communities throughout the Commonwealth. Findings from the survey indicate:

- 43% of respondents are experiencing anxiety and depression
- Wide-ranging financial impact including loss of jobs, income, and childcare
- Difficulty accessing food and paying bills
- Concern over access to health care and risk of infection

Governor Baker declared a State of Emergency on 3/10/20 due to the Coronavirus. The CSW formed a 10 member Action Committee 3/26/20 to conduct this study. Commissioner Audrey Hall of Framingham was selected as Chair of the Action Committee. Hall said, “We acted quickly to identify the COVID-19 impact on women and girls. This data will help our legislators create policy to aid the recovery process and address systemic flaws that threaten our citizens’ well-being and make our economy more vulnerable.”

The report was submitted Friday 4/17/20 to Governor Baker, Senate President Karen Spilka, House Speaker Robert DeLeo, and The Caucus of Women Legislators. It is being released today to the full Legislature and made available on the agency’s website. For more information, contact mcsw@state.ma.us or visit www.mass.gov/women.

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an independent state agency that was legislatively created in 1998 to advance women of the Commonwealth to full equality in all areas of life and to promote their rights and opportunities. The MCSW provides a permanent, effective voice for the women of Massachusetts and has statutory authority to report on the status of women and girls in the Commonwealth. The CSW has 19 Commissioners (appointed by the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House, and the Caucus of Women Legislators) and three staff members. This project was organized by a CSW COVID-19 Action Subcommittee shortly after Governor Baker declared a COVID-19 State of Emergency. Data was collected 4/2/20-4/9/20.

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