



MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report June 2022

Commissioners

Jean Bertschmann (Hopkinton, MA), Stephanie Deeley (Framingham, MA), Heather Panahi (Wellesley, MA), Rachel Niemiec (Ashland, MA), Leslie Smart (Framingham, MA), Lindsey Galvao (Natick, MA), Julie Watt Faqir (Holliston, MA), Lisa MacDonald (Natick, MA), Nasiba Mannan (Hokinton, MA)

Student Interns: Deirdre Belger

Officers Elected for 2022

Heather Panahi, Co-Chair
Stephanie Deeley, Co-Chair
Leslie Smart, Vice-Chair
Lisa MacDonald, Secretary
Lindsey Galvao, Legislative Committee Co-Chair
Julie Watt Faqir, Legislative Committee Co-Chair

Outgoing Members

Nancy Rosenblum
Ceylan Rowe

New Members

Julie Watt Faqir
Nasiba Mannan

Athena Council Members

Deirdre Belger
Mia Remington
Anjali Batra
Tomo Oga
Anna Hamilton

Ashleigh Chiwaya
V Ramaswamy
Ashwina Bangari
Sophie Perlman

Mission: Our goal as a Commission, beyond our mission statement as defined in our by-laws, is to strengthen our ability to advocate on behalf of MetroWest women. We seek to do this by listening, learning, and informing ourselves about the issues that matter to the majority of women in our region, determine effective outreach strategies and developing a robust list of stakeholders. These efforts are intended to improve our ability to play a role in the support and advancement of women and the promotion of their rights and opportunities.

Overview/Summary of MWCSW Actions/Priorities

In 2021-22, the MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women continued to actively work to improve and increase its visibility in order to better represent women and girls in the region. Moreover, we wanted to be more engaged in bringing awareness to some of the issues and pending legislation we and our constituents care most deeply about. To these ends, the commission hosted and/or participated in several local events this year. Below is information on some of our public events held in 2021-2022.

Hidden in Plain Sight: Human Trafficking in Massachusetts: On September 9, 2021 the MW Commission partnered with the Northborough Women's Club for a virtual panel discussion on human trafficking in Massachusetts.

Moderated by MetroWest Commissioner Rachel Neimiec, our distinguished panelists included:

- Senator Harriet Chandler
- Northborough Police Chief William B. Lyver
- Rachel Matos *Voices Against Violence*
- Nicolle Bell *LIFT* (Living in Freedom Together)

Our overall goal was to bring awareness to the way people in our community are experiencing human trafficking. As a survivor herself, our sister Commissioner and panel moderator, Rachael Neimiec knows the vulnerabilities that most survivors have in common. We aimed to inform participants and help them understand those vulnerabilities which will help us all to address this issue and recognize it.

We had 57 attendees and a robust discussion with our panelists answering questions from the attendees and offering some insight on next steps to combat this issue.

Purple Passion Walk: On September 18 2021 members of the MW Commission and our Athena Council fielded a team to raise money and support the work done by Voices Against Violence, a sexual assault and domestic violence support organization based in Framingham and covering most of the communities we represent. Our Co-Chair, Stephanie Deeley, was the keynote speaker for this year's event.

The event allowed commissioners to participate in an advocacy activity together, as well as to make connections and network with other organizations/agencies that are also committed to working on behalf of women and girls in the region. The Commission hosted a table at this event with handouts for the community about the work the Commission does in MetroWest and information on how to follow what we do. The Commission also had purple ribbons printed that said "*For Kim*" which were

handed out to all runners and attendees. Kim Boleza, a victim of domestic violence who was lost in 2013, is the sister of our Commissioner, Stephanie Deeley.

Domestic Violence Awareness: During October, 2021 the MetroWest Commission held 4 Virtual Events for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

- **October 7: On the Frontlines—Organizations and Services Combating Interpersonal Violence in the MetroWest and Greater Massachusetts** --Panelists were Mary Roche, Outreach and Prevention Specialist for Voices Against Violence Hema Sarang-Sieminski, Esq., Policy Director for Jane Doe, and Marian Ryan from the DA office.
- **October 14: Shattered—The Impact of Interpersonal Violence on Loved Ones: Families Share Their Stories** –Panelists were Malcolm Astley and Mary Dunne, parents of Lauren Astley (1993-2011) and Stephanie Deeley, sister of Kim Boleza Parker (1967-2013)
- **October 21: But is it Love? Teens Discuss the Crisis of Interpersonal Violence and What THEY Need** -- A Teen-Only Listening Circle, hosted by the MWCSW's Athena Council

All of these events were well attended and we collected important information to help us define our focus on this issue as one of our priorities for 2022 and beyond. Based on these discussion, the MW Commission set in motion a plan to work with legislators and advocates to require a defined curriculum in all public schools in Massachusetts to teach students in grades K – 12 age appropriate information to help them avoid unhealthy relationships, with a focus on understanding what consent is and how important it is in any healthy relationship.

In **March of 2022** the Commission met via Zoom with legislators and their staff from the offices of Senate President Karen Spilka, Senators Eldridge and Rausch, and Representatives Lewis, Gentile and Higgins to share with them what we learned at our events, and to ask them to partner with us as we worked to ensure that all students in Massachusetts schools have the opportunity to learn about healthy relationship. All have agreed to partner with us in these efforts and agreed to meet every 6-8 weeks to work on this issue.

MWC Athena Council Mental Health Listening Circle: This year, the Athena Council surveyed teens in Metro West to gather data regarding mental health in order to identify areas where the Commission and legislators can better support teens in Metro West. The data was shared at a teen's listening circle on March 27th at Framingham Public Library and will be again at a Legislative Ice Cream Social on June 5th at Hopkinton Historical Society. In their monthly meetings, the Council planned these events, supported the Commission on their social media presence, and created and disseminated the results of the survey distributed over the winter.

Women's History Month, March 2022: In March, members of the MW Commission were invited to be panelists for events in Framingham and Ashland about women's history. On March 28th Commission Co-Chair Stephanie Deeley was a panelist for "She's Beautiful When She's Angry" organized by the Framingham library on the topic of the women's liberation movement.

On March 31st, Commission Secretary, Lisa MacDonald, was a panelist at an event on “Promising Young Women” hosted by the town of Ashland.

Prison Moratorium Event: In April of 2022 the MW Commission partnered with others involved in supporting the prison moratorium bill to hold a rally in Framingham on the Common. As co-sponsors of the event, Co-Chairs Heather Panahi and Stephanie Deeley, and Vice-Chair Leslie White participated in the event raising awareness about this legislation. Co-Chair Stephanie Deeley spoke at the event. There was great coverage of this event, including a story on the front page of the MetroWest Daily News raising awareness of this cause, and of the MW Commission and the work we do.

Followed up with a call with Senate President Spilka’s staff to discuss how to best move this legislation forward in the current session. Will be meeting with the Ways & Means members via Zoom in May.

Legislative Ice Cream Social: On Sunday, June 5th our Athena Council will be holding an Ice Cream Social for Legislators and School Committee Members. At this event the Athena Council will share the information they collected in their climate survey, and will ask legislators to support legislation around the issues of mental health.

MW Commission Book Club: To continue working towards promoting and creating more inclusive, welcoming and respectful communities throughout the region, we have launched a new virtual DEI book club. Metro West READ (Reading for Equity, Accountability and Diversity) aims to engage community leaders, legislators and constituents of all backgrounds and ages, in a literary exploration of the many identities, experiences and challenges of the people who make up our diverse region and conversations about how we can get greater support to one another given these realities.

Metro West READ plans to meet virtually by Zoom every 2-3 months, to discuss books of both the fiction and non-fiction genres that fit with a particular DEI theme or identity. There will be time to converse as a full group and in affinity-based breakout spaces to maximize our understanding. Our first session will take place on June 19, coinciding with ‘Juneteenth’.

50th Anniversary of Title IX: On June 22nd, The Commission is hosting a panel of experts to talk about Title IX, what it has accomplished, and what still needs to be done. We are doing this via Zoom to allow a broader audience to join us for this important discussion.

All of the events listed here were widely publicized throughout the MetroWest area via print and social media helping to make the MW Commission more visible and effective in our area.

Partnerships/Networking: We continue to work at growing our network of partners throughout the MetroWest region. With each event hosted, we are trying to get our name out there and offer our support to like-minded organizations.

Goals for 2022-2023

- To continue to boost the commission’s visibility among the region’s constituents, as well as other organizations focused on improving the lives of women and girls

- Work to focus on legislation and issues falling under 3 specific topics we have identified as priorities for the next year: elder care; interpersonal relationship violence; outreach to immigrant communities
- Continue to work with legislators to build a plan for a standardized curriculum for educating students about healthy relationships and the importance of consent
- Reach out to groups we have not been successful at reaching in the past via CommuniTEAS, small group events at local coffee shops or libraries each focused on a particular group
- Build our social media presence more effectively
- Work with our Athena Council on planning at least one public event to hear from young women in metrowest about the issues important to them
- To continue to ‘grow’ our book club by increasing our outreach to schools and the communities we serve inviting them to join us

Submitted by Heather Panahi and Stephanie Deeley, Co-Chairs
May 25, 2022