



UPPER MIDDLESEX REGIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Annual Report
2021 - 2022
(Submitted May 2022)

Commissioners

Connie Chow, Chair (Newton); Corrinne Corso (Ayer); Jennifer Roecklein-Canfield (Littleton); Christina Li, Secretary (Lexington); Rebecca Neale (Bedford); Michelle Mullet (North Reading, term starting 3/2022); Kristina Racek-Pachulis (Melrose); Linda Rossetti (Winchester); Anna Tse (Malden); Mary Delorse Coleman (Cambridge, term ended 12/2021).

Mission

The mission of the Regional Commission is to uphold ideals and pursue actions consonant with the upward economic and social mobility of women and girls. We do so by gathering empirical evidence to mobilize and amplify the voices of women and girls; and generating transformational recommendations that create and sustain accountable systems that enable women and girls to thrive.

Advocacy

Based on the comprehensive reports generated by the state commission as well as commissioners affiliated with the domestic violence and childcare services networks, our commission selected the following legislation as key areas of concern and advocacy.

1) **Common Start: An Act Providing Affordable and Accessible High Quality Early Education and Care to Promote Child Development and Well-Being and Support the Economy in the Commonwealth (S.362/H.605)**. This bill promotes affordable, high-quality early education and child care for all Massachusetts families, which increases economic and social mobility for women.

2) **Protected at Work: Act Relative to Employment Protections for Victims of Abusive Behaviors (HB 2018/SB 1173)**. The bill addresses gaps in current law that leave victims of abusive behavior vulnerable at work, including a prohibition against discrimination based on status as a victim of abusive behavior.

3) **An Act supporting Parents Running for Public Office (S.475/H.769)**. This bill broadens civic participation for women and removes barriers to women running for political office.

Other legislation considered include:

- An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products (SD.2730) that would provide immediate, material benefit and restore dignity to menstruating individuals in all public institutions including schools and jails.
- An Act establishing a jail and prison construction moratorium (S2030), led by those most affected, which seeks to halt prison rehabilitation or construction, redirecting funds from incarceration towards health and wellbeing instead.

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2022: A legislative action speaker series and a virtual townhall. We also supported programs that are in line with our mission as listed below.

Legislative Action Speakers Series. To continue to inform ourselves on the commission's legislative priorities, to understand community-based programs already in place that address issues of concern, and to build relationships with the community and assess how the commission might leverage our role to advance their work, we continue to invite speakers to our open meetings. Jaki Apsler, Executive Director of Domestic Violence Services Network was the speaker on Feb 1, 2022, and Sam Hammar, founder of Run En Masse, on May 17th.

- **DVSN, Inc.** emphasizes agency for survivors by helping them assess risk and make decisions by recommending and connecting with resources; and to reduce isolation and connect to community. They have partnerships with multiple entities that are located within the towns we serve. However, their services were greatly impacted by COVID. We will continue to be alert to and publicize their needs.
- **Run En Masse** addresses the barriers that women and people of color face in running for public office, from financial to technological, in order to bring strong leadership and bold policy into government. Unfortunately, this group will cease to operate soon. We are thinking about how we might urge legislators to leverage the richness of our technology sector to continue these efforts.

Virtual Townhall: What is the future of women in the workforce? An evening for learning and hearing. Co-sponsored by YW Malden and others. June 15, 6 - 8 pm.

The event includes four components. 1) Education on status and intended impact of our current year legislative priorities, CommonStart and Protected at Work; 2) Sharing of findings and recommendations from recent MCSW report Women in the Workforce ; 3) Testimony related to need for related legislation and feedback on recommendations; and 4) General testimony on needs of women and girls in the region.

As part of our mission to gather empirical evidence and generate transformational recommendations for social and economic mobility, testimony and input from this townhall and related survey will be compiled into a report to inform priorities and advocacy for the next legislative session.

In line with the Women in the Workforce report, we intended this as the beginning of regional conversations that will continue to reset our expectations and together, reimagine how our lives and communities can thrive, while repairing the harms that have always existed but revealed by the pandemic, through existing and new legislation, policies and programming including education, events and services, informed by the voices of those who have been most affected. What does that look like? How do we get there?

Other programs

- Co-designed and supported young women of color leaders in facilitating a workshop on Confidence and Leadership for the April 2022 GELI Summit
- Provided advice and helped disseminate the survey, COVID19 on Career Aspirations initiated by Simmons University and one of our commissioners

Goals for the fiscal year 2023

Goal 1. Continue to expand our community and network in the region, with specific focus on sectors, issues and regions that we have yet to build knowledge and connections. We built a list of legislators in the region and started the legislative action speaker series using our current network. Our goal is that those working to advance women and girls' social and economic mobility will see us as an effective connector, listener and advocate.

- a) We will continue our Legislative Action Speaker series in our full group meetings, and publicize them through our mailing list/ targeted invitations, and
- b) co-host at least two additional educational / community engagement panels on issues of concern to those who identify as women, especially women and girls of color.
- c) We will conduct a community asset mapping exercise to ascertain areas of expansion and employ an outreach intern to build connections. This can include adding ourselves to mailing lists of coalitions and organizations, interviews as well as attending events.

Goal 2. Create and enact a succession plan that also promotes civic participation.

In other words, rather than just replacing commissioners, we hope to create a vibrant, supportive circle of women and girls who can advise, practice advocacy, and continue to serve with us as commissioners and beyond.

- a) We aim to include at least 2 non-commission volunteer members in each committee, to expand our capacity, provide mentorship and to ensure continuity in programming. We

will start with those who have already applied to be on the commission as well as individuals that individual commissioners have identified.

- b) We will explore the creation of a youth council or advisory group modeled on the Athena Council first established by the Metrowest regional commission and under consideration by the state commission, as we have a young commissioner interested in leading this initiative. We will connect with Heather Panahi this summer and draw up a plan, and ideally recruit using the list from GELI as well as other girl-serving organizations.
- c) We intend to work with the state commission and other regional commissions to create and test recruitment, onboarding and training materials.

Goal 3. Revisit Equity Audit collaboration with UMass Boston.

We will pursue alternate areas of funding to support the Equity Audit as detailed in the 2021 annual report.

Submitted by Connie Chow on May 25, 2022