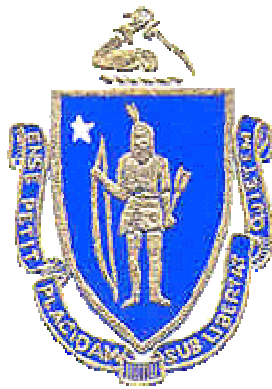




Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2003:  
July 2002 to June 2003



**Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women**

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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Massachusetts. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

The Commission Is Empowered To:

- ◆ Study, review and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth;
- ◆ Inform leaders of business, education, health care, state and local governments, and the communications media of issues pertaining to women;
- ◆ Serve as a clearinghouse for information on issues pertaining to women;
- ◆ Identify and recommend qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government, including boards and commissions;
- ◆ Promote and facilitate collaboration among local Women's Commissions and among women's organizations across the state.

**COMMISSIONERS**  
(As of June 30, 2003)

Marianne C. Fleckner, Chair  
Elaine F. Guiney, Vice-Chair  
Jo Anne M. Thompson, Secretary  
Barbara Gomes-Beach, Treasurer  
Nilka I. Alvarez-Rodriguez  
Kathleen A. Casavant  
Martha B. Chadwick  
Donna Finneran  
Mary Clare Higgins  
Frances X. Hogan  
Dr. Helen Jackson  
Dianne Luby  
Dr. Roseanna H. Means  
Angela F. Menino  
Mary Reardon Johnson  
Susana Segat  
Kateri B. Walsh

**STAFF**

Linda A. Brantley, Executive Director  
Paula A. Daddona, Program Coordinator / Web Master

**INTERNS**

The Commission also utilizes student interns and this year was fortunate to have working with them Allison Hooper, a recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, and Lynn Arsenault of Northern Essex Community College. The Commission is grateful for their invaluable contributions.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Fiscal Year 2003 was one of both celebration and transition for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. In May, the Commission celebrated its fifth anniversary. It is hard to believe that five years have already passed since the legislation that created the Commission was signed into law. Much has been accomplished, yet much remains to be done.

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women was enacted by law in May 1998. The legislation was inspired by the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. One result of this conference was the Beijing Platform for Action, which recommended that state and federal governments support councils, commissions, networks, and other organizations that focus on women's issues.

Specifically, the Platform directed state governments to "form and adequately fund Women's Commissions in all states and territories where they do not already exist." Massachusetts' delegates who attended the Beijing Conference returned determined that Massachusetts would have its own Women's Commission. Their passion helped to create a coalition of women that met regularly over the course of several years to bring this dream to fruition.

In the end, with the help of many, particularly state legislators, this group of extraordinary women were able to fashion a unique and model Commission – with appointing authority shared by the Executive and Legislative branches. When the Commission was enacted by law, it was established as an independent state agency with funding provided by a line item in the state budget. Its appointing authorities include: the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Women's Legislative Caucus.

The recognition of the Commission's "Founding Mothers" was a key part of the Commission's Fifth Anniversary Celebration, "Women's Commissions Day at The State House," which was held at the Massachusetts State House on May 19, 2003. The Caucus of Women Legislators joined the Commission in sponsoring this event, which was attended by over 100 guests. All state legislators, members of Women's Commissions from across the state, appointing authorities, key partners, and other special guests were invited to join the MCSW in the celebration of the anniversary as well as the work of Women's Commissions across the Commonwealth.

Receiving certificates of appreciation for their commitment and efforts were: Susan Roosevelt Weld, Martha Chadwick, Priscilla Golding, Virginia Greiman, Maya Hasegawa, Jean Inman, Antonia Jimenez, Barbara Langford, Diane Moriarity, Patricia Nickerson, Samantha Overton Bussell, Nancy Ryan, Jo Anne Thompson, Marie Turley, and Suleyken Walker. The Commission is proud that two of its "Founding Mothers" currently serve on the Commission – Martha Chadwick and Jo Anne Thompson.

In addition to the anniversary, the year brought major changes to the Commission. The following Commissioners ended their terms: Minosca Alcántara (appointed by former Governor A. Paul Cellucci), Jennifer C. Braceras (appointed by the Speaker of the House, Thomas Finneran), and Susan K. Howards (appointed by former Governor A. Paul Cellucci).

The Commission welcomed Martha B. Chadwick, who was appointed as a new Commissioner by former Acting Governor Jane Swift. The Commission also bid farewell to its first Executive

Director, Priscilla A. Golding, and welcomed a new Executive Director, Linda A. Brantley, in February 2003.

## **Key FY 2003 Commission Activities and Accomplishments:**

### **◆ Fifth Year Anniversary - Women's Commissions Day at the State House**

On Monday, May 19, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators, celebrated the fifth anniversary of the passage of the legislation that created the MCSW. Over 100 guests were on hand to recognize the occasion and to help honor the Commission's "Founding Mothers" – a group of women who devoted themselves to establishing a state commission following the Beijing Conference.

Lt. Governor Kerry Healey began the program with welcoming remarks and was congratulated by MCSW Chair Marianne C. Fleckner for the Administration's formation of a permanent Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, which Healey will chair. The Commission is proud that it will be part of this very important initiative.

### **◆ Hiring a New Executive Director**

In February, Linda A. Brantley was hired as the new Executive Director of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. Ms. Brantley, a Newburyport resident, has over 20 years experience in public, community, media and government relations, marketing, and event planning. For the past ten years she has worked in public higher education, employed at Northern Essex Community College (NECC) in Haverhill and Lawrence, MA.

Ms. Brantley's experience and expertise include fundraising, outreach to business and industry and workforce development, public relations, legislative, community and media relations, marketing, and more. She is the 2002 recipient of the Greater Haverhill YWCA's Tribute to Women "Woman of the Year" Award, and is a co-creator, alumnae and former coordinator of Leadership Merrimack Valley, NECC's 10-month leadership development program.

Ms. Brantley holds a dual degree in journalism & management from Syracuse University and is a former newspaper journalist. She also worked in the healthcare industry for five years as Director of Community Relations at Martha's Vineyard Hospital.

For the past seven years Ms. Brantley was involved with work on women's issues, including being an active member and co-chair of the Winning Opportunities for Women Committee of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, a YWCA Board member and a Tribute to Women Steering Committee member.

The Commission is pleased to welcome Ms. Brantley and is greatly looking forward to working with her to enhance and expand the scope of the Commission and its work.

◆ **Publication of the “How to Get Appointed to Boards and Commissions” Handbook**

This year the Commission published and widely distributed a handbook on “*How to Get Appointed to Boards and Commissions.*” This project addresses the Commission’s mandate to empower, identify and recommend qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government, including Boards and Commissions. The Commission believes it is imperative that more women participate in the policy and decision-making processes of their state and local governments. Through this involvement, all women’s voices will be better heard.

The publication, which provides a listing of the major Massachusetts state Boards and Commissions, is designed to provide women easy access to information about the many opportunities available to them. State Boards and Commissions are a significant component of state government. Members are able to affect public policy, network and access state policy makers, and represent their constituencies and perspectives.

The Commission hopes that the creation and wide distribution of this directory will educate and encourage women to seek out appointments and play an active role in their communities and state. This activity will ultimately increase the number of qualified female candidates and further the accountability of state government in fulfilling its responsibility to address women’s issues and concerns.

◆ **Domestic Violence Awareness**

The Commission has identified violence against women as a priority, and, on October 3, 2002, collaborated with Acting Governor Jane Swift and the Governor’s Commission on Domestic Violence in issuing a proclamation which declared October “Domestic Violence Awareness Month” in Massachusetts.

Also in October, the MCSW and the Governor’s Commission on Domestic Violence co-sponsored a panel discussion at Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, MA. The members of the panel discussed the domestic violence services that their organizations provide and how they deal with domestic violence. Panel members included Antonia Chronis, Domestic Violence Specialist at the Department of Social Services Metro Regional Office, Victoria Fahlberg, Director of the One Lowell Coalition, Mariam Gas, Executive Director of Somali Women and Children Associates, and Beverly Kennedy, Executive Director of the Governor’s Commission on Domestic Violence. The panel was well attended and a lively discussion ensued.

The Commission also forged an alliance with the Massachusetts Medical Society around its priority of Violence Against Women to distribute pamphlets on violence prevention to statewide community and grassroots agencies such as YWCAs and Girls Inc. chapters around the state.

◆ **Public Hearings in Lawrence & Greater Boston**

The Commission continued its series of public hearings in fiscal year 2003 by holding hearings in Lawrence and Greater Boston. The hearings are open to anyone wishing to

participate and many individuals and organizations are invited to attend. In addition to inviting the Commission's female constituents, the Commission always invites legislators, local government officials, local organizations serving women, and individuals/community leaders from the communities in which the hearings are held.

A report summarizing the testimony from each hearing, as well as results of a survey conducted at each hearing, are distributed to all hearing participants, the Commission's appointing authorities, as well as legislators, regional and local officials and various women's organizations. These reports are also posted on the Commission's Web site and are easily downloadable.



## **COMMISSION OVERVIEW**

The Commission is an independent state agency that is comprised of nineteen appointed Commissioners. The Governor appoints five Commissioners; the Senate President appoints four Commissioners; the Speaker of the House of Representatives appoints four Commissioners; and the Caucus of Women Legislators appoints six Commissioners.

Commissioners are selected from throughout the Commonwealth and are a diverse group of committed women. Commissioners volunteer their time to work with the Commission's staff on programs, legislation, and constituent services. This year, as always, the Commission's work was guided by the Commission's mandate "to provide an effective voice for women in the Commonwealth."

The Commission meets regularly on the fourth Wednesday of each month, except in July and August. Special guests and speakers are often invited to the monthly full Commission meetings to educate Commissioners and help broaden their perspectives. This year, three full Commission meetings were held off-site. In October 2002, the full Commission meeting was held at Merrimack College in North Andover. During this meeting, the Commission collaborated with artist Kathleen Bitteti to address Violence Against Women. Commissioner's viewed Ms. Bitteti's artwork titled "House," which was a large-scale paper house made of restraining orders. In November 2002 the full Commission meeting was held at the Psychological Center in Lawrence and a well-attended public hearing immediately followed the meeting. In June 2003 the full Commission meeting was held in Commissioner (Mayor) Mary Clare Higgins' office in Northampton, MA.

## **COMMISSION OFFICERS AND SUBCOMMITTEES**

The Commission is governed by bylaws that guide its operation and outline the election of officers and the committee structure.

Officers for fiscal year 2003 include:

*Marianne C. Fleckner, Chair*  
*Elaine F. Guiney, Vice-Chair*  
*Barbara Gomes-Beach, Treasurer*  
*Jo Anne M. Thompson, Secretary*

Since the full Commission meets once a month, the majority of the Commission's work is done in subcommittees. Every Commissioner sits on at least one subcommittee. The subcommittees usually meet once a month. The subcommittees then report back to the full Commission for approval and support. The FY'03 subcommittees were as follows:

- 1. Executive Subcommittee: Commissioner Fleckner, Chair***

The Executive Subcommittee is composed of the four officers, the chairs of the other subcommittees, and the past chair of the full Commission. It meets once a month to review Commission activities and plan for the full Commission meeting.

2. *Budget Subcommittee: Commissioner Gomes-Beach, Chair*  
The Budget Subcommittee works with the Executive Director and the Treasurer to monitor and track the Commission's budget allocations and spending.
3. *Education / Public Relations Subcommittee: Commissioner Walsh, Chair*  
The Education/Public Relations Subcommittee works with the Commissioners and staff to educate the public and to raise awareness of the Commission and its accomplishments.
4. *Legislative Subcommittee: Commissioner Hogan, Chair*  
The Legislative Subcommittee considers legislation to endorse. When making decisions on endorsement, the Legislative Subcommittee carefully examines both sides of a bill and also looks to the testimonies presented at public hearings. It is the Commission's goal to eventually write and/or sponsor its own legislation.
5. *Personnel Subcommittee: Commissioner Finneran, Chair*  
The Personnel Subcommittee oversees the hiring of staff, the performance review of the Executive Director and other staff related issues.
6. *Planning and Task Force Subcommittee: Commissioner Johnson, Chair*  
The Planning and Task Force Subcommittee is made up of two task forces:
  - ◆ Violence Against Women
  - ◆ Child Care

These task forces were created to focus on the Commission's two major priorities.

## **COMMISSION BUDGET**

The Commission is an independent state agency. The Commission staff is responsible for all personnel and fiscal administration but receives ongoing assistance from the Office of the State Comptroller and the Human Resources Department. The Commission complies with state-mandated policies and maintains a balanced budget.

Budget History and FY 2003 Expenditures:

<b>Commission on the Status of Women</b>	<b>BUDGET FY'2001</b>	<b>BUDGET FY'2002</b>	<b>BUDGET FY'2003 Actuals</b>
Total Income from State Appropriation	\$195,000 (Reduced to \$165,000)	\$165,000 (Reduced to \$145,000)	\$145,000
Salaries	\$131,000	\$131,000	*\$98,046
Operating Expenses	\$ 64,000	\$ 15,000	\$46,954

\*The Commission was not fully staffed during FY'03 due to employee turnover. Thus the Commission realized one-time salary savings.

MCSW has hired a part-time Administrative Assistant for the end of FY'03 and FY'04. However, due to insufficient funding, MCSW cannot afford a full-time Administrative Assistant even though there is ample work and need for a full-time support person. Currently, 2.5 people are serving the over three million women of the Commonwealth. This is a situation the Commission hopes to rectify in the near future as more fiscal resources become available.

## **HOW THE COMMISSION FULFILLS ITS MISSION**

### **1. Study, review and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth**

- ◆ The Commission participated in the 2002 publication and release of “*The Status of Women in Massachusetts – Politics, Economics, Health, Rights, Demographics,*” a project of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. This invaluable document identifies the current status of women of the Commonwealth across a wide spectrum of key indicators. It is an extremely useful tool for planning and public policy change.

### **2. Assess the status of Massachusetts’ women through meeting directly with women around the Commonwealth to hear their concerns, identify gaps in services and potential solutions**

- ◆ Holding public hearings to listen to the voices and concerns of women and organizations working with, and advocating for, women in Massachusetts is an ongoing activity of the Commission. The Commission uses public hearing testimony and hearing survey results to shape its work. The Commission has held 11 public hearings to date, two this year, in Lawrence and Greater Boston. A report summarizing the testimony from each hearing and survey results are widely distributed. These reports are also posted on the Commissions Web site and are easily downloadable.

The Commissioners use the testimony offered at these hearings to guide them as they select priority issues on which to concentrate their efforts. Based on the feedback from women and girls in the Commonwealth, violence against women and childcare were selected as top priorities for the Commission’s work this fiscal year.

### **3. Advocate for legislation and public policy changes that will positively impact the status of women**

- ◆ *The Commission has endorsed and worked to pass seven pieces of legislation:*
  - ◆ An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Victims of Sexual Assault
  - ◆ An Act Providing Equitable Coverage of Services Under Health Plans
  - ◆ An Act to Ensure Eligibility for Unemployment Insurance for Victims of Domestic Violence
  - ◆ An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Insurance Policies
  - ◆ An Act to Establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts
  - ◆ An Act Creating Early Education for All
  - ◆ An Act Creating a Commission on the Status of Women in the Berkshires
- ◆ *New England Regional Paid Family Leave Coalition*

The Commission has joined with representatives from New England Women’s Commissions, labor and others to discuss a regional approach to enacting Paid

Family Leave legislation. The Coalition has received a \$25,000 grant from the Heinz Foundation for its work.

◆ *Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (MassFESS) Project – Updating the Standard*

MCSW is pleased to continue its long affiliation with The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union’s MassFESS Project, which is working to develop a measure of the true costs of living, working and raising a family in Massachusetts. The MCSW participated in the release of the update of the standard this spring - “Real Costs for Real People,” which found that the cost of self-sufficiency has risen dramatically in Massachusetts. In Boston alone, the report notes that from 1998 to 2002, the costs for a family of four rose 28%, led by housing and childcare, with housing costs alone escalating 61%. Translated into dollars, a Boston family of four would need to earn \$4,551 per month or \$54,612 per year just to make ends meet. That compares with \$3,547 a month and \$42,564 a year in 1998. The cost of renting a two-bedroom apartment in Boston has skyrocketed from \$839 a month to \$1,343 a month, while childcare costs have risen from \$985 to \$1,226.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates basic living costs such as housing, food, health care, childcare, transportation, miscellaneous items (clothing, household supplies) and taxes. Unlike the Federal Poverty Guideline, the Standard accounts for differences in family size and configuration, geographic cost variations and the impact of taxes and tax credits.

First released by The Women’s Union in 1998, the Standard provides a measurable tool that can be used to create, implement and evaluate sound educational and workforce development policies, thereby reshaping public policy. The Women’s Union has filed legislation, which the MCSW has endorsed, to have the Commonwealth adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard and use it as an official benchmark in forming public policy.

◆ *Women in Poverty Task Force*

The Commission is part of this committee, chaired by State Representative Anne Paulsen, which strives to lessen the burden on this group.

**4. *Serve as a clearinghouse for information on issues pertaining to women***

To this end, the Commission seeks to assist and serve women in the Commonwealth in their quest for basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life. The Commission office is open to assist constituents who walk in, telephone, or e-mail with questions or concerns. The Commission staff provides either information or referrals. Issues frequently raised this fiscal year included: domestic violence, legal assistance, health insurance, child care & support, employment rights, maternity leave policies, unemployment, financial assistance, child custody and divorce, equal pay, and research questions.

The Commission created and maintains a clearinghouse of information – perhaps the largest in the state - on information of interest to women and families, including information on all agencies and organizations statewide that serve women. This clearinghouse is a tool to serve the women and girls in the Commonwealth. Because the Commission does not provide direct services, when constituents contact the office with a question or inquiry, the staff accesses the clearinghouse files and database to make referrals to an organization serving that person's particular need. The organizations to which constituents were frequently referred include: various government agencies, advocacy groups, and legal services groups.

The Commission publishes this information, along with links to resources, on the MCSW Web site, which is well utilized. The MCSW Web site had over 8,244 visitors in FY 2003. Plans are underway to vastly expand the resources available on the Web site.

**5. *Promote and facilitate collaboration among local Women's Commissions and among women's organizations in the state.***

- ◆ The Commission continues its mandate to promote the growth of local Women's Commissions throughout the Commonwealth. Appointed volunteers lead the majority of local Women's Commissions. The Commission's Executive Director is working with organizing committees in the cities of Taunton, Greenfield and the Berkshires to develop Women's Commissions that will work on local and regional issues affecting women. The organizing committees include community women, elected officials and MCSW staff. Utilizing the models of other local Women's Commissions in Massachusetts and resources from the National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW), the Commission provides technical assistance to the organizing committees. MCSW is a resource for both established and emerging local commissions.
- ◆ On October 12, 2002, the MCSW and the Brockton Mayor's Commission on Women's Issues collaborated at the Massasoit Conference Center to recognize and honor five Brockton women for their contributions to the Brockton Community. The outstanding women recognized include: Andrea Bates, Executive Director of the Brockton Symphony Orchestra and a tireless advocate of the arts in Brockton; Samella Burse, Chair of the missionary department of the Lincoln Congregational Church and a volunteer at the Brockton Reach Independence through Self Empowerment program; Ruth Harris, Executive Director of Little Prince and Princess Daycare center; Mary Beth McManus, Public Grants Administrator in the Brockton School System, who is responsible for securing significant funding for a variety of school programs; and Florence McNamara, Manager of the Charity Guild, Inc. food pantry. These women are unsung heroines who have made significant contributions and have positive, caring attitudes. These women serve as exceptional role models.
- ◆ The Commission is an active member of the New England Women's Commissions and the National Association of Commissions for Women.

◆ *Habitat for Humanity: WomenBuild*

The Commission is forging a statewide alliance with Habitat for Humanity on its WomenBuild initiatives. WomenBuild is a program initiated by Habitat for Humanity to both construct homes for families in need and to foster confidence within women that they can actively contribute to the construction of simple affordable housing. Throughout the nation more than 350 homes are WomenBuild constructed. Women from all walks of life, from the statehouse to the neighborhoods in which the homes are built, have joined forces to plan, finance, and physically construct WomenBuild homes. The homes are for women – and will be constructed and financed by women. The project is about building and sustaining hope for children and their families through providing simple, safe and affordable housing.

The first project is currently underway in the Merrimack Valley, where over 350 women have banded together to build two homes for two families beginning with the construction of two duplexes in Haverhill, a project of the Greater Lawrence Habitat for Humanity. The two, three-bedroom homes will cost \$150,000 and are slated to be ready to be inhabited by December of this year. Commission Chair Marianne C. Fleckner and Executive Director Linda A. Brantley attended the “Wall Raising” kick-off event of the project and participated in the program. The full Commission will spend time working at the site over the summer.

- ◆ The Commission has collaborated and formed alliances with a wide variety of organizations on projects of mutual interest that impact the status of women. Collaborators include Early Education for All, Jane Doe, Inc., Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (MassFESS), the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, Women in Prison Task Force, and the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence.
- ◆ For National Women's History Month in March, the Commission joined forces with many groups, including the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Association of Haitian Women in Boston, Boston Women's Commission, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, Irish Immigration Center, Mass Action for Women, Somali Women and Children's Association, to host the annual International Women's Day celebration on March 7 at Simmons College. Commissioner Roseanna Means was a featured panelist.
- ◆ Commission staff and Commissioners regularly attended meetings of other groups throughout the year. Examples this year include: the Winning Opportunities for Women Seventh Annual Women in Business Conference; North Shore Women in Business Financial Forum; Fifth Annual Greater Lawrence Women and Policy Symposium; Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce Women in Government Luncheon; Springfield YWCA Groundbreaking for Battered Women's Shelter; YWCA of Greater Haverhill's Tribute to Women Luncheon; YWCA of Greater Boston's Women's Leadership Luncheon; 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Tribute to Abigail Adams Reception and a Women in World Trade Reception.
- ◆ The Commission works regularly with the Caucus of Women Legislators on both issues and legislation of concern to women across the Commonwealth.

**6. Inform leaders of business, education, health care, state and local governments and the communications media of issues pertaining to women**

- ◆ The staff of the Commission, along with the Commission's Education / Public Relations Subcommittee, works diligently to educate the public and raise awareness of the Commission and its accomplishments. Success was achieved with this task in various ways, including:
  - Regular correspondence and outreach to constituents and legislators
  - Publication of a Commission newsletter
  - Publication of a Commission brochure
  - Maintenance of the Commission Web Site
- ◆ The Commission's Web site ([www.mass.gov/women](http://www.mass.gov/women)) is a user-friendly tool that constituents can use to learn about the Commission. Features of the Web site include: a list of domestic violence and sexual assault hotline numbers on the local, state, and national level; a list of Massachusetts' hotline numbers; information on topics such as childcare, economic issues, education, elder advocacy, health and insurance advocacy, housing advocacy, and legal assistance. The Commission's Web site also contains information about the Commission, such as the Commission's mission statement and goals, list of current commissioners, calendar of upcoming Commission meetings and events. Public hearing reports, hearing survey results and photos from each hearing are also posted. Other Commission publications are also available for PDF download on the Web site, such as the Commission's brochure and newsletter.

**7. Identify and recommend qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government, including boards and commissions**

- ◆ MCSW created and published a "*How to Get Appointed to State Boards and Commissions*" handbook to encourage women of the Commonwealth to become involved in public service.
- ◆ MCSW participated in the Massachusetts Government Appointment Project (MASSGAP). The project seeks to increase the number of women appointed by the governor to cabinet level positions, agency heads, and selected authorities and commissions.
- ◆ The Commission is pleased to join with other New England Women's Commissions to co-sponsor the *New England Women's Political Summit*, which will be held on October 26 & 27 at the JFK Library in Boston. The event is spearheaded by The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at UMASS Boston. The Summit will bring together women from every walk of political life in order to: examine the current status of women in politics in each of the New England states; share strategies to strengthen women's impact on politics; develop targets for increased representation and influence; and generate concrete action plans for increasing women's representation at the municipal, state and national levels in each of the six states. This two-day event will commence with a Pre-Summit panel and reception which will feature nationally prominent women discussing what it takes for women to "make it"



in politics. A full day conference will follow and will include prominent women in politics from the New England region sharing their stories and strategies as well as time for planning and strategizing on how women can make a difference in the future of politics. Over 400 women are anticipated to attend.

**8. Work with other local, state and federal government agencies on issues and/or projects that affect women**

- ◆ The Commission was a member of the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence and worked with it and Jane Doe, Inc. to hold hearings around the state and to acknowledge "Domestic Violence Awareness Month" in Massachusetts. The Commission also participated in a press conference by former Governor Swift during this month.
- ◆ MCSW' Executive Director Brantley, along with Jacqueline Cooke from the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, and Marie Turley from the Boston Women's Commission were the featured speakers at the Federal Special Emphasis Coalition's Women's History Month Program on March 20. They addressed a group of approximately 50 federal employees and offered an overview of the creation and celebration of Women's History Month as well as a national, state and local overview of programs and resources for women.
- ◆ The Commission participated in the USS Constitution's Women's History Month Celebration on March 21. The Commission received mention in both the written and oral program. It was agreed that the Commission would assist the USS Constitution staff with future events targeted towards women.
- ◆ MCSW Executive Director Brantley attended the *Commonwealth of Massachusetts Citizens Legislative Seminars* at the Statehouse March 19 – April 23.
- ◆ The Commission forged an alliance with the Massachusetts Medical Society around its priority of Violence Against Women and distributed pamphlets on violence prevention to statewide community and grassroots agencies such as YWCAs and Girls, Inc. chapters around the state.
- ◆ The Commission annually works with the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, NY to educate, promote and gain recognition for Massachusetts' women being inducted into this prestigious organization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is at an exciting juncture in its history. In celebrating the fifth anniversary of the passage of the legislation that created it, the Commission realized both how far it has come – and how much remains to be accomplished.

The Commission is a small organization, with a huge mission. The 19 volunteer Commissioners and three staff members are charged with helping to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and promoting rights and opportunities for all women. Furthermore, MCSW exists to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Massachusetts. The Commissioners and staff bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the crucial task of improving the status of women in Massachusetts. Their work represents a huge return on a very small investment by the state.

The Status of Women in Massachusetts report, published last fall, provides a blueprint for future efforts. The report clearly details the hurdles left to surmount. It notes, “Women in Massachusetts exemplify both the achievements and shortfalls of women’s progress over the past century. While most Massachusetts women are witnessing real improvements in their economic, political and social status, serious obstacles to their equality with men remain, and too many Massachusetts women are left behind.” Despite its high average income, Massachusetts is a state of high inequality and relatively high levels of hardship, especially among minority women. The report states, “Women in Massachusetts, and the nation, would benefit from:

- Stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws
- Better political representation
- Adequate and affordable child care
- Stronger poverty reduction programs and
- Other policies to improve their status.”

In evaluating Massachusetts women’s status, Massachusetts earns the grades of:

- B in employment and earnings, social and economic autonomy, and reproductive rights
- B- in health and well-being
- and, C+ in political participation

Some initiatives - such as the Self Sufficiency Standard, Paid Family Leave, changes in Domestic Violence legislation and more - are already underway and the Commission is pleased to be a partner in these projects. As the Commission moves to address other inequalities, we welcome all to join with us to move forward on improving the status of women in Massachusetts. Together we can truly make a difference for the women of the Commonwealth. It is the combination of legislative power, community activism and public and private enterprise that will take us where we want to go. And what a journey it will be!

## ***APPENDIX***

### I. Commission Bylaws