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**Commissioners**  
**(As of June 1, 2001)**

Susana Segat, Chair  
Roseanna Means, Vice Chair  
Barbara Gomes-Beach, Secretary  
Minosca Alcántara, Treasurer  
Sandra Jesse Carter  
Kathleen Casavant  
Donna Finneran  
Marianne Fleckner  
Mary Ann Glendon  
Elaine Guiney  
Mary Clare Higgins  
Frances Hogan  
Susan Howards  
Helen Jackson  
Mary Reardon Johnson  
Angela Menino  
Jo Anne Thompson  
Gwendolyn Tyre  
Kateri Walsh

**Staff**

Priscilla Golding, Executive Director  
Heidi Kruckenberg, Program Coordinator  
Melixza Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Commission 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.

## **Introduction**

This is the fiscal year 2001 Annual Report of the findings and activities of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. Commission activities and accomplishments over the past year reflect our mission statement.

This year the Commission came a long way, building a strong internal and external organization. Fiscal, personnel, and administrative procedures were developed and administered. Committees became fully operational, chaired by Commission members.

Most importantly, the work the Commission did this year has been guided by our mandate "to be a voice for women in the Commonwealth." By continuing to hold public hearings in various regions of the state, the Commission listened to the voices of women and girls. The testimony offered at these hearings was used by the Commissioners as they decided on the priority issues for this year. Based on the feedback from women and girls in the Commonwealth violence against women and child care were selected as top priorities for the Commission's work this fiscal year.

The Commission carefully considered activities and projects before undertaking them, to ensure that they reflected our commitment to the betterment of the lives of women and girls in Massachusetts. Guided by its priorities, the Commission endorsed and supported three pieces of legislation this year. Community and collaborative events also helped to improve the lives of women and girls.

The nineteen volunteer Commissioners represent a varied group of committed women who work with staff and volunteers on programs, legislation and constituent services. We look forward to the coming years as we build on the strong foundation of fiscal year 2001 activities.

## **Staff**

In February 1998 when the Commission was created the Commissioners set out to build the infrastructure of the organization. Our main goal was to create the Commission as an independent and productive agency in the Commonwealth. One of our most important objectives was to recruit and hire a full complement of staff.

Following all of the Commonwealth's guidelines, the Commission succeeded this year in creating and then filling all staffing vacancies. This was our first full year in operation; we became fully staffed during the summer of 2000. With the office staffed,

the Commission was ready to set goals and policies. The staff, which helps to facilitate these goals, consists of: Priscilla Golding, Executive Director; Heidi Kruckenberg, Program Coordinator; and Melixza Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant.

It is been a Commission goal to welcome interns and volunteers to our office. This year we have hosted interns from a range of colleges, including Cecilia Blaine (Center for Women and Politics, U. Mass Boston); Megan Conley (Boston College); Vicky Hush (Boston University); Pam Mutascio (Simmons College); Rachel Schwartz (Wellesley College); and Cheryl Siegel (Smith College). We thank them for their commitment and hard work.

This spring we recruited throughout the Commonwealth for summer internships. More than 40 candidates applied for two positions.

### **Commission Administration**

Since the Commission is a newly-created independent agency, there were many administrative tasks to become familiar with. The Commission staff's first directive was to learn how to maneuver through the internal workings of the Commonwealth. The staff attended trainings in both the MMARS and HRCMS systems; learned how to hire interns and enroll them in payroll; and learned the procurement and billing systems, the telecommunications systems, and the computer systems. An internal administrative activity included the purchase and cataloging of books, journals, and videos for the Commission's library of media regarding women's issues.

This year the Commission spent time straightening out several bureaucratic issues, such as making sure that staff was categorized and paid at the proper levels; authorizing and implementing a maternity leave; and clarifying the status of the Executive Director in her statutory non-classified position.

The Commission also complied with state-mandated policies. Performance reviews were completed for all staff. All our bills were paid within 30 days. The Office of the Comptroller presented the Commission with an award of excellence for 100% bill paying practices. Finally, the Commission maintained a balanced budget.

The Commission maintained its growing momentum, notwithstanding the changes in membership. The following Commissioners ended their terms this year: Marlyn McGrath Lewis (appointed by the Governor), Meiling Hazelton (appointed by the Senate President), and Beth Boland (appointed by the Caucus of Women Legislators). The following Commissioners were appointed to new three-year terms: Susan Howards (appointed by the Governor), Kathy Casavant (appointed by the Senate President), and Elaine Guiney (appointed by the Caucus of Women Legislators). The following Commissioners were reappointed for three-year terms: Minosca Alcántara, Jo Anne Thompson, and Mary Reardon Johnson (reappointed by the Governor); Kateri Walsh

and Susana Segat (reappointed by the Senate President); Donna Finneran and Helen Jackson (reappointed by the Speaker of the House); and Angela Menino and Barbara Gomes-Beach (reappointed by the Caucus of Women Legislators).

The Commission considers its Bylaws a living document, and as such, made three official changes to the Bylaws this past year. We have clarified the group's internal expectations for Commissioner participation, including contributions to committee work and attendance at full Commission meetings. We deleted the need for a Nominating Committee for elections. The Commission has also started creating internal policies, including the use of official stationery, our procedure for dealing with the media, and the mechanics of standardizing our attendance expectations.

### **Officers and Working Committees**

The Commission is governed by Bylaws that outline the election of officers and the committee structure. Officers for Fiscal Year 2001 are: Susana Segat, Chair; Roseanna Means, Vice-Chair; Minosca Alcántara, Treasurer; and Barbara Gomes-Beach, Secretary.

The Commission operates through working committees that take on various tasks and then report back to the full Commission for approval and support. There are several working committees within the Commission. They include: the Budget Committee, chaired by Treasurer Alcántara; the Personnel Committee, chaired by Commissioner Finneran; the Planning Committee, chaired by Commissioner Carter; the Legislative Committee, chaired by Commissioner Hogan; the Education/Public Relations Committee, chaired by Commissioner Walsh; and the Executive Committee, which is made up of all of the officers and committee chairs and headed by the Chair of the Commission. We have created a Special Committee on Statewide Hearings, which is in charge of planning for hearings. Lastly, the Task Force on Child Care and the Task Force on Violence Against Women were created to focus on the Commission's two major initiatives for the year – child care and violence against women.

Every Commissioner sits on at least one committee. The committees meet on an as-needed basis, usually once per month. The full Commission meets regularly on the fourth Wednesday of every month, and the Executive Committee meets regularly on the second Monday of every month.

Working committees for Fiscal Year 2001 include: Budget, Personnel, Planning, Legislative, and Education/Public Relations. The Budget Committee works with the Executive Director and Treasurer to keep track of the Commission's finances. This past fiscal year the Budget Committee set up a budgeting system that corresponds to the Governor's Spending Plan. The Personnel Committee's goal for Fiscal Year 2001 was to help the Executive Director implement employee evaluations and to perform an evaluation of the Executive Director. The Planning Committee reviewed constituent feedback and helped the Commission determine that child care and violence against

women are the two issues we will primarily focus on this year. The Legislative Committee researched and then recommended legislation for endorsement by the Commission. Finally, the Education/Public Relations Committee worked to educate the public about the Commission and to increase the Commission's visibility.

Since the full Commission only meets once a month, it has been the goal of the Commissioners to move the bulk of the work to the committees. Now that this goal is starting to be realized, there is more time during the full Commission meetings for educational pursuits. Therefore, we have invited special guests and speakers to our monthly meetings to help broaden our perspectives. The Commission's first speaker was the Deputy Commissioner of Public Health, who reported on women's health throughout the Commonwealth and presented results of the DPH/CDC health survey. Our second speaker was the Mass Action for Women group, who showed the Commission their final report on three-year's worth of their research. It is our hope to continue to invite guest speakers to our monthly Commission meetings throughout next year.

### **Financial Expenditures**

Expenditures Fiscal Year 2001:

<b>Commission on the Status of Women</b>	<b>Monthly Summary PROPOSED BUDGET FY 2001</b>	<b>Expenditure Cumulative from July 1, 2000 to May 31, 2001  ACTUAL</b>	<b>\$ OVER/UNDER BUDGET</b>
<b>Income</b>			
Total Income	\$195,000.00		
<b>Expenses</b>			
Salaries	\$130,562.87	\$111,673.88	\$18,888.99
Hearings Budget	\$8,209.95	\$5,846.99	\$2,362.96
Office Expenses	\$28,072.83	\$12,169.75	\$15,903.08
Media	\$8,380.00	\$4,011.00	\$4,369.00
Travel/Consultants/Fees/Reception	\$18,774.35	\$11,338.31	\$7,436.04
Miscellaneous	\$1,000.00	\$278.55	\$721.45
Total Expenses	\$195,000.00	\$145,318.48	\$49,681.52

This is the first full year of expenditures by the Commission because the three full-time staff positions were filled in July 2000. This year, our projections were modified because one staff person was on a 12-week maternity leave. Out of our \$195,000 appropriation, approximately 67% of the budget goes to salaries, both for our full-time staff and for our paid interns. Estimates for ongoing expenses will be re-evaluated for the Fiscal Year 2002 operating budget.

### **Planning Committee**

With the first phase of the Commission development complete (building infrastructure and hiring staff), the Commission began its second phase of development by working on programmatic goals. After a process that included input from the participants of our public hearings and input from each Commissioner, the Commission agreed to focus its work on two main issues: child care and violence against women. These two areas were mentioned most often in the public hearings, and therefore speak to the major concerns of women and girls across the Commonwealth. The Commission will look at both issues from the perspective of both women and girls.

It is clear that for both of these issues, the Commonwealth and outside agencies are doing tremendous amounts of work. The Commission's task is not to duplicate the work being done. Our first step will be to look at programs statewide to discern strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots. Once this is accomplished, our next step will be to formulate recommendations and work toward their implementation.

### **Task Forces on Violence Against Women and Child Care**

The Task Force on Violence Against Women was recently created within the Commission to study this issue. Their first action was to convene a round table of experts and advocates from throughout the Commonwealth. Forty people attended this first round table on May 17, 2001. The discussion centered on the broad topics of violence against women and girls, its many repercussions, and what services are both available and out of reach. A priority list of actions that the Commission could do to better understand the broad and complex financial and societal costs of violence against women was created. Among several items, the Commission committed to coordinating a study of the economic costs of violence against women, both when all the service needs are met and when they are unmet. All the round table participants will be included in the study design and process.

The Task Force on Child Care was also created and their development is ongoing.

### **Legislative Committee**

The Legislative Committee handles requests from outside groups seeking the Commission's endorsement of legislation and also seeks out legislation to endorse independently. When making decisions on endorsement, the Legislative Committee

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 our own legislation.

This year, the Commission voted to endorse three pieces of legislation. The first one is S.804 *An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Insurance Policies*. Considering that present law does not conform to the Massachusetts Equal Rights Amendment, the Commission feels that it is important to act now to support gender equity in insurance policies. Any form of discrimination in the insurance industry that is allowed to go unchallenged would be a step back in the lives of women statewide. This is an issue of fairness and equity.

The second endorsed bill is S.97/H.2651 *An Act to Ensure Eligibility for Unemployment Insurance for Victims of Domestic Violence*. Violence against women was the issue most frequently raised at public hearings through testimony and surveys and the Commission believes that this issue is of critical importance to the Commonwealth. This bill would assure an employee affected by domestic violence the economic security she/he needs to assist her/him in securing a safe and stable living situation. Additionally, it would give an employee the support she/he needs in obtaining suitable employment in the future.

The third bill is S.141/H.2836 *An Act to Establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts*. This Self-Sufficiency Standard will calculate realistic costs of housing, food, child care, transportation, medical care, taxes, and miscellaneous costs by region within the state. It will establish a realistic independent benchmark of economic status; an actual cost of living in the various regions of the Commonwealth. It may be used as an official and accurate reference point for policymakers when developing and evaluating workforce training and education programs.

All of the bills the Commission has endorsed have been consistent with our mission. We stand for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

### **Education/Public Relations Committee**

The goal of the Education/Public Relations Committee is to educate the public and to raise awareness of the Commission. The Committee worked to accomplish this in several ways.

The Commission's website ([www.state.ma.us/women](http://www.state.ma.us/women)) was posted online in July 2000. The website is a user-friendly tool that constituents and Commissioners can use to learn about the Commission and its events. Monthly web server statistics on the number of hits the site received indicate that traffic has increased dramatically since last summer. In the month of July 2000, the site had 445 hits, and in the month of April 2001, 3,672 hits were recorded.

Features of the Commission's website include a list of domestic violence and sexual assault hotline numbers on a local, state, and national level. A list of Massachusetts' hotline numbers offers information on topics such as child care, economic issues, education, elder advocacy, health and insurance advocacy, housing advocacy, and legal assistance. The Commission's website also contains information about the Commission itself, such as a list of current commissioners, contact information for all the women's commissions in Massachusetts, the Commission's mission statement and goals, as well as a calendar of upcoming Commission events.

A recent addition to the Commission's website is a page highlighting innovative programs and projects across the Commonwealth that serve women and girls. We look forward to expanding this section of the website.

A section of the website focusing on the Commission's public hearings contains photos of the event, a copy of the survey results, and the full report of the hearing. Other Commission publications are also available for PDF download on the website, such as our brochure.

Additionally, the Commission established a clearinghouse and database system of organizations across the state that work with women and girls. Hundreds of groups were contacted by student interns to request literature for the Commission's clearinghouse files. The literature has been placed in our files for easy access. The clearinghouse files and database are used together to organize information about groups and agencies in Massachusetts.

The Commission database contains over 2,000 entries. The database entries are arranged according to geographic location, and individuals are separated from organizations. Each organization is categorized by activity, which is then cross-referenced to the clearinghouse file system. The database is used for outreach for Commission events and public hearings as well as for newsletter mailings. Our mailing list of individuals has grown considerably this year with over 100 people currently listed. We have shared the database with our collaborators and with other state agencies, increasing outreach to diverse communities of women.

In efforts to increase awareness of the Commission, we have done outreach to the media. Newspaper articles about the Commission and about specific Commissioners have raised our visibility. Several radio spots have been recorded in the past year, particularly to promote the public hearings. See the Attachments for copies of articles about the Commission.

The Commission has also started a regular newsletter that is targeted to community-based organizations and to girls' groups. In addition, a Commission brochure was created.

## Events

In celebration of the first full year of operation, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women hosted an Open House at our office in the Charles F. Hurley Building on December 13, 2000. Over 200 people attended the event, representing state and community agencies, as well as constituents.

In an effort to better serve constituents and to reach a wider audience, the Commission co-sponsored several events this year.

The Commission hosted a visiting delegation of women from Croatia in June 2000. These 16 women were government officials from counties and municipalities with interest in women's issues. Their visit to the United States centered on a women's gathering at the United Nations in New York last summer. Intrigued by the Commission's recent establishment, the women were interested in our appointment process and our relationship to the government and to community organizations.

The Commission co-sponsored a conference titled "Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise: Securing Women's Health, Pension, and Workplace Rights," with the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau and Women's Health on December 7, 2000. This conference provided 160 participants with information on health care coverage and pensions for women.

As a member of the New England Coalition of Commissions for Women, we participate in regular meetings of the Coalition. These meetings provide the women's commissions in New England networking opportunities, as well as a chance to talk about their work and discuss regional goals. For example, the Coalition held a round table discussion on paid family leave on January 26, 2001, to convene experts, activists, and legislators in New England. The discussion provided the women's commissions a chance to strategize ways to approach the subject of paid leave in their state.

For National Women's History Month (March 2001) the Commission joined forces with many groups (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, and the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau) to host an International Women's Day celebration on March 8, 2001. "Personal Stories from Working Women Around the World" was the theme of the event, which was held at Simmons College.

Another Women's History Month event co-sponsored by the Commission was "An Afternoon with Massachusetts' Women Legislators" on March 29, 2001. The American Association of University Women, Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston, and

Massachusetts Association of Older Americans co-sponsored this event, which was held at the State House.

The Commission is also an active member of the National Association of Commissions for Women. It is our goal to participate at each NACW annual convention.

### **Collaboration**

In line with our charter to promote and facilitate collaboration among local women's commissions and among women's organizations, the Commission cooperated and collaborated with multiple agencies during the past year. Commissioners and staff met with leaders of state agencies such as the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Public Health, and the Governor's office to discuss issues and exchange ideas.

The Commission became a member of the Girls' Coalitions in both eastern and western Massachusetts. These coalitions consist of various organizations concerned with girls' issues.

Commission staff and Commissioners regularly attended meetings of other groups throughout the year, such as the Mass FESS Project and Women in Prison. As mentioned previously, the Commission also cooperated with groups and commissions on events (International Women's Day, the Boston Girl's Hearing, Afternoon with Women Legislators, etc.).

The Commission has also held meetings with the Caucus of Women Legislators and hopes to continue to do so regularly. We are also in the process of meeting with individual legislators in order to introduce the Commission's work.

Lastly, the commission recently voted to focus on its mandate of promoting and facilitating the growth of women's commissions throughout the Commonwealth. The Chair will ask the directors of the existing women's commissions to join a Special Committee of the Commission to help develop a template on how to establish a women's commission. This template will be a resource that cities and towns can use to create commissions for women. A letter will then be sent to the heads of our cities and towns recommending that they institute a women's commission and offering our help to make it happen. It is our hope that every year there will be a significant increase in active local women's commissions.

### **Public Hearings**

Public hearings are an ongoing, long-term goal set by the Commission last year. The purpose of the public hearings is to listen to the concerns of women, girls, and organizations advocating for women and girls in Massachusetts. Last fiscal year, in June 2000, two such hearings were held – the first in Springfield and the second in Pittsfield.

The Commission continued with its series of public hearings in Fiscal Year 2001 by holding four more hearings in various regions of the state: Lawrence, New Bedford, a special Girls' Hearing in Boston, and Cape Cod.

The Commission did outreach to legislators, local government officials, local organizations serving women and girls, individuals from the community, and community leaders to invite them to attend the public hearing. Included in this outreach was a survey of issues related to women and girls in Massachusetts. The survey results can be found in the Attachments of this document. The survey results, along with a report summarizing each hearing, were widely distributed. The Commission used the survey results and hearing testimony to shape its work for this year.

All hearings are planned in attempts to remove obstacles to attending. Child care is provided and translators are available. Time and location are planned in particular to draw as many people as possible.

### ***Lawrence***

On October 18, 2000, the Commission held its third public hearing in Lawrence at the YWCA of Greater Lawrence. Fifty-one people attended this hearing and 24 presented testimony. Issues raised include: specific legislation, violence against women, hospital mergers, child care, gender-specific programming, reproductive rights, poverty, and housing. Nine girls spoke at the hearing about girls' issues such as being treated with respect by boys, date rape, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Refer to the Attachments to see newspaper coverage of the Lawrence Public Hearing.

### ***New Bedford***

The fourth public hearing was held at the First Unitarian Church of New Bedford on November 15, 2000. Forty-two participants attended the hearing and 27 testified. Domestic violence, sexual assault, women in public office, drug abuse, welfare, the MCAS tests, reproductive rights, breast cancer, specific legislation, and child care were issues raised at the hearing. An article from the *New Bedford Standard-Times* regarding this hearing can be found in the Attachments.

### ***Boston Girls'***

The Commission's fifth hearing focused exclusively on girls' issues in a collaborative effort with the Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston, the Boston Women's Commission, the Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women, and the Somerville Commission for Women. A special survey was created that centered on girls' issues (see the Attachments for the results of that survey). The hearing was held at Roxbury Community College on March 15, 2001. Commissioners listened to testimony offered by 42 participants, many who were girls and young women. Over 200 people attended the hearing, and a large part of the audience consisted of girls and young women. A diverse

range of issues was raised: eating disorders, body image, sexual orientation, media, mentoring and leadership, sexual harassment, self-defense, HIV and STDs, discrimination, violence, teen pregnancy, and drug and substance abuse.

### *Cape Cod*

The Commission's sixth and final public hearing for Fiscal Year 2001 was held at Cape Cod Community College on May 9, 2001. Sixty-four people attended and 32 testified. Issues raised in testimony include: gun control, support for specific legislation, violence against women, housing, gay rights, and elderly rights. An article about the Cape Cod hearing is located in the Attachments.

### **Direct Constituent Information and Referral**

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women 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, call, or email with questions or concerns. Office staff provides either information or referrals. Issues frequently raised include: legal assistance, health insurance, child support, domestic violence, employment rights, maternity leave policies, unemployment, financial assistance, child custody and divorce, equal pay, and research questions. Additionally, constituents had questions about the Commission itself and our events.

As mentioned previously, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women has a clearinghouse of files containing information about organizations and agencies that focus on issues relevant to women and girls. 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: local YWCA, Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, local legal services, Mass Bar Association, local housing authority, Attorney General's Office, local women's commission, Department of Transitional Assistance, and the Women's Statewide Legislative Network.

As the visibility of the Commission increases more people are utilizing our constituent information and referral services. We have referred over 100 people to service agencies and government offices. An expanded hotline list, planned for the summer of 2001, will be available by print and through our website.

## Attachments

Committee List

Summary of Issues Raised at Commission Hearings 2000

Survey Results for Public Hearings

Newspaper Articles About the Commission

“Commission to Discuss Women’s Issues”

“Worries: Housing, Violence, Abortion”

“Forum Focuses on Women”

“Report Details Women’s Needs”

“New State Commission Seeks to Give Women a Stronger Voice”

*Cape Cod Enterprise* article