

## **Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

Dawn Forbes DiStefano  
Michelle Goncalves  
Patricia Hallberg

Nicole Murray  
Jennifer Metsch  
Ellen Moorhouse

Arlene Rodriguez  
Shanique Spalding  
Shaitia Spruell

### **ANNUAL REPORT May 2018**

#### **Members:**

Dawn Forbes DiStefano—West Springfield  
Michelle Goncalves—Ludlow  
Patricia Hallberg—Wilbraham  
Jennifer Metsch—Longmeadow  
Ellen Moorhouse—Springfield  
Nicole Murray—Agawam  
Arlene Rodriguez—Springfield  
Shanique Spaulding—Springfield  
Shaitia Spruell—Springfield

#### **Elected Officers:**

Nicole Murray—Chair  
Shanique Spaulding—Vice Chair  
Michelle Goncalves—Secretary

#### **Purpose:**

On April 25, 2017, the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women inaugurated nine new commissioners to a newly formed regional commission created to study and report on the status of women and girls in the twenty-three towns and cities that make up Hampden County, Western Massachusetts. “The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is a state-established body charged with reviewing the status of women in Massachusetts and offering recommendations regarding policy that would improve access to opportunities and equality.” Taking from the brief provided, the Regional Commissions: “Modeled after the MCSW, the...unfunded county and regional women’s commissions were legislatively created to study and report on the status of women and girls in their geographical areas, and to provide permanent and effective voices for women and girls. Each county and regional commission reports their findings annually to MCSW.”

#### **Membership:**

Last April, nine Commissioners were sworn into the newly established group. We had one member leave at the end of her term and one new member join. We also voted in a new Secretary when the

previous Commissioner's term was completed. In our May 2018 meeting, we made nominations for the elected positions for the next year. We will be voting on those next month.

Our focus this year regarding our membership has been on creating committees, establishing who would be on them, and for what length of time each member would serve on each committee. We wanted to be sure that everyone had a chance to be on each committee, but we also wanted to make sure there was a continuity in the process so that the forward movement of each committee would not stall with changes of Commissioners on the committees.

#### Accomplishments:

This year has been about strengthening our commission's foundation by establishing regular meetings, a succinct agenda and firming it all up with bylaws. We wanted this foundation to be strong when we put ourselves out to the public. We wanted the women and girls of Hampden County to feel confident in our ability to adequately represent them and their interests throughout the state. This attention to detail has paid off thus far and we now hope to be able to really dig in now. Here are a few things we have accomplished this year:

Our Legislative Subcommittee worked heavily on establishing bylaws for our commission. Now that they have been completed, the Legislative Subcommittee will be moving toward finding legislation our commission will champion. The idea is to begin writings including letters of support regarding the legislation, expressing how that legislation helps further the interests of women and girls in Hampden County, while also providing information so that women and girls of Hampden County are kept in the loop regarding the goings on within the legislature.

Our Social Media and Communications Subcommittee has been working on giving the Hampden County Commission an online presence. On January 11, 2018 we joined Facebook. The page currently has 183 "likes". The Social Media Subcommittee has created a draft Social Media Policy, which we are in the process of finalizing. They also put together a HCCSWG email address ([HCCSWG@gmail.com](mailto:HCCSWG@gmail.com)) with a general email response message created to acknowledge any emails received before the designated Commissioner can respond. This has been added to our notice in case someone wishes to speak during the Public Speakout portion of our monthly meetings. Those who wish to speak are asked to let us know in advance so that ample time is allotted. The Committee is working on a outreach campaign to identify County and regional events and issues that should be promoted through our social media pages, and they have plans to create events for all future HCCSWG meetings in order to better publicize our activities.

The Programming Subcommittee has been planning our first official public hearing, currently scheduled for November 8, 2018 at the Chicopee Boys and Girls Club and are working to build a database of relevant county-based organizations to invite and engage in the hearing, thereby increasing our commissioner knowledge of the county and introducing our commission to key organizations in the area. The Programming Subcommittee has also arranged our participation in the CHD Through her Eyes conference at the MassMutual Center on October 25, 2018 as part of our county listening tour.

As a commission, we hosted Jessica Collins, Executive Director, and Jessie Gleckel, Senior Research Associate, of the Public Health Institute of Western MA Committee Sessions on March 15, 2018 to learn more about the health of women and girls in Hampden County and agreed to

explore partnership opportunities between the commission and the institute related to events and activities relevant to women and girls in the county.

We also hosted Jennifer Falcone, Coordinator of Western MA Business Against Human Trafficking, on January 11, 2018 to discuss human trafficking in Hampden County and agreed to explore partnership opportunities between the commission and the organization related to events and activities relevant to women and girls in the county, especially as the Springfield casino opens.

Members of our group attended MCSW Advocacy Day again this year where they were able to advance issues of importance to our county with our elected officials. Those in attendance were Shanique Spalding, Arlene Rodriguez and Jennifer Metsch.

We have hosted 9 commission meetings in 8 different cities and towns across Hampden County (Holyoke, Springfield, Agawam, Ludlow, Longmeadow, West Springfield, East Longmeadow and Monson) in an effort to get the commission out into the communities we serve. On top of this, we have created an online space where we store past notices, agendas and minutes, allowing members of the public to check out any and all of these accomplishments.

#### Conclusions:

This past year we really wanted to put our focus on getting basics down regarding the setup of our organization. We have worked diligently on getting a meeting agenda that maximizes our time and effort. We have established committees and provided time within the meeting space to discuss both in our committees and as a full commission, opportunities for our commission to further our mission. We have actively sought out organizations within Hampden County to find out more about the overall climate of the county and how to best serve the women and girls of the area. We are excited now to begin our second full year as a commission by going out and hearing more about what the women of Hampden County are looking for and would like to see from us. We have been lucky to have had members of the public at most meetings. We will be expanding on that by having the hearing in November, and most likely another one in the spring of 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole M. Murray, Chair HCCSWG