



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

### **Annual Report 2018**

#### **Commissioners**

Denise Brown (Northampton), Vice Chair  
Marianne Bullock (Greenfield)  
Ginetta Candelario (Northampton)  
Linda-Jeanne Mack (Easthampton), Clerk  
Bonnie MacCracken (Amherst), Treasurer  
Keleigh Pereira (Turners Falls)  
Marcia Plant Jackson (Leverett)  
Chelsea Sunday Kline (Northampton)  
Francia Wisnewski (Montague), Chair

HD#1867 Act Established in January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 a Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women. This legislation has created a permanent Hampshire-Franklin Commission on the Status of Women, consisting of nine individuals to be appointed by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. Per its enabling legislation, the Hampshire-Franklin Commission is charged with conducting an ongoing study of matters concerning women within Hampshire and Franklin counties. The Commission is mandated to report its findings to the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women annually and to recommend solutions to the challenges facing the women and girls of the Hampshire-Franklin area.



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

### **Completed Bylaws**

Our Commission established a group of temporary officers until we finalize our bylaws. These bylaws will guide our purpose in the region, we are excited to have finalized a draft. A State Commissioner with law background is supporting us in ensuring that we have appropriate language and compliance. We allotted time during each meeting to go over a portion of the bylaws, therefore it took us most of the year to finish a draft in satisfaction. We project to have our final approved version for July of 2018.

### **Searched for and hired an unpaid student research and media intern**

Our regional commission is pleased to have worked with Heather Honig as our first intern supporting our work. Our fellow Commissioner, professor Ginetta Candelario offered us an opportunity to be a liaison and finding us a student at Smith College. We offered to Heather the position of Resources Research Internship.

Heather focused her work in:

- 1) Identifying organizations, initiatives, projects, etc. currently serving or otherwise addressing issues related to the status of women and girls in Hampshire and Franklin Counties;
- 2) Compiling that data;
- 3) Developing and populating a searchable database;
- 4) Preparing a resource guide;
- 5) Present brief updates on the progress of the work at the meeting of the Commission held on the last Monday of every month (February 26, March 26, April 30).

This project took about 100 hours and began the week of February 9th. The project was completed by the end of May, 2018 when classes ended at the college.



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**



Heather Honig is a rising senior at Smith College studying Sociology and Education & Child Study. She is most interested in finding ways to make education equitable and accessible to all people, no matter their background. She has worked with numerous organizations that seek to accomplish this, including Project Coach in Springfield, MA; Homework House in Holyoke, MA; and The Institute for Educational Advancement in Pasadena, CA. Most recently, she was responsible for creating the Commission's resource guide. She hopes that this resource guide will empower and support women in Hampshire and Franklin counties and that it continues to expand in the years to come.

### **Developed a Guidebook**

This guide is in draft version, but ready to share in July of 2018. Includes resources available in our region for women and girls. We will be taking a step further in seeking ways to share widely with local networks and search engines.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/15AkCZRU3lTuakHGeyzXtL8ZMgKc6MdPfP9w0kWL1T7c/edit>

### **Held 10 public Commission Meetings**

Our Commission has consistent and well attended meetings. We take turns every month in each one of the region representing. Our meeting are scheduled for two hours and have been held on the third Monday of every month.

### **Participated in the Franklin County Resource Network's Legislative Breakfast**

Last October 6<sup>th</sup> of 2017, our Commission was invited to be part of "Amplifying the Voices of Rural Women and Girls" from 8:30-11 at the Greenfield Community College. This legislative breakfast was organized by the Franklin County Resource Network. Under this umbrella, one of our Commissioners Keleigh Pereira serves as head organizer and was part of the planning Committee for the event. We have the opportunity to join legislators and community members that shared their stories of success and challenges. Margo Parrot, Chair of the MCSW was the keynote speaker. \* Remarks from Margo Parrot, \*\* Remarks from Francina Wisnewski



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**



### **Attended the Statewide Regional Commission meeting**

Our Commissioners attended the Semiannual meeting, hosted at the YWCA in Worcester on November 14<sup>th</sup> of 2017. Topics covered were:

Individual Commission Updates, Successes and Challenges

- Marketing, outreach, and communications
- Expanding collaboration with other regional commissions and MCSW, e.g. legislative agenda, unsung heroine nominations
- Developing programming and events
- Ethics (Open Meeting Law and Conflict of Interest handout with URL to online training site)
- Legislative Outreach
- Conflict Resolution

### **Commissioner trained in the “Salary Negotiation” for the MCSWG**

Commissioner Denise Brown, was trained to be a facilitator for the “Just Ask” Salary negotiation training. This training is A Collaborative Initiative The American Association of University Women (AAUW) and Office of State Treasurer and Receiver General, led by State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, launched a statewide initiative to teach 5,000 women a year to negotiate their salaries and benefit packages with confidence. The initiative also aims to help close the gender pay gap in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

### **Commissioned a logo design for the HFCSWG**

Commissioner Linda Jean Mack found an in-kind donation of a local graphic designer, Ms. Kristin Centrella. The logo will be finalized by July of 2018. The graphic contains the female (Venus) symbol ♀ and behind it will be a river representing the Connecticut river as the commonality of our region.

### **Researched potential fiscal agents**

We have been voicing our need to build a budget to support activities for our commission. Our Treasurer Bonnie MacCraken connected with The Peace Development Fund, in Amherst, as they offer fiscal sponsorship opportunities. The sign-up fee is \$250 (non-refundable) and the annual fee is \$95.

Website hosting is also offered at \$35 a year. Bonnie found them through the National Network of Fiscal Sponsors. The Commission discussed the possibilities for raising the required funds to get the fiscal sponsorship started.

A discussion was had regarding the 7.5% off the top of funds that the Peace Development Fund would charge. It was concluded that this was a typical rate. We understand that we cannot start this fund until we clarify our roles and responsibilities by legislation statute.

### **Participated in Pregnant Workers Protection Act Training with State Commissioner Liz Friedman**

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Commissioner attended a webinar with State Commissioner Liz Friedman on Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, legislation details, components of advocacy and lessons learned in the Commonwealth.

### **Invited Commissioner Friedman to act as MSCSWG Liaison**

We have been lucky have the support of the State Commission's Chair, Margot Parrot, she was acting as our mentor since she lives in Franklin County. We were happy to learn that Liz Friedman was named to the State Commission and is our new liaison.



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

### **Attended Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Breakfast**

We decided to build relationships with local business owners and members of the various chamber of commerce in the two counties that we serve. Our first participation was on February 23 of 2018 at GCC. The breakfast featured Congressman Jim McGovern and his presentation on key issues pressing our congressional district.



### **Welcomed new Greenfield Commissioner**

Last fall we lost a commissioner due to personal circumstances. We had a successful search with thirteen qualified applicants. After making our recommendation to the State Commission, Last December, we welcomed Marianne Bullock to complete our commission.

### **One Commissioner completed her starting 6-month term, and was re-appointed for a 3-year term.**

After being sworn in as the first commission of the region, Commissioner Ginetta Candelario completed her term and accepted a unanimous reappointment for a subsequent three-year term.

## **COMMISSIONERS**

## **BIO**

### **Bonnie MacCracken Amherst, MA**

Bonnie is a business owner, mother, grandmother, and has dedicated over 10+ years to public service and leadership in community nonprofits, boards, and on issues of housing insecurity. She chairs the NAACP, New England Area Conference's housing committee; is a





## Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls



founding member of the Amherst Community Land Trust, established to increase affordable housing; and appointed to the Hampshire-Franklin Commission in 2017. In 2012, she drafted and successfully lobbied for an amendment to the Massachusetts Homestead Act to protect deployed Massachusetts servicemembers from foreclosure of their homes. This amendment passed under the Valor Act of 2012. Simultaneously she operates her 30-year real estate-title research business, specializing in extensive, in-depth legal research on titles to land for residential and commercial closings and works pro bono with Massachusetts Alliance Against Predatory Lending with foreclosed homeowners and on drafting policy.

Bonnie resides in Amherst with her family. She is graduate of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact (LIPPI) and Anna Maria College.

### **Chelsea Sunday Kline Northampton, MA**



Chelsea is a graduate of Smith College and Harvard Divinity School, and a higher education administrator and educator focusing on supporting non-traditional female students. She leads a few academic and leadership programs at Bay Path University in the American Women's College, including the Women as Empowered Learners and Leaders (WELL) program, the Leadership and Organizational Studies (LOS) program, as well as the Arts and Humanities offerings.

Chelsea has a long history of work in social justice and reproductive rights organizing, activism, and volunteerism, and has attended countless marches, demonstrations, and conferences. She was a student organizer of the Civil Liberties Public Policy (CLPP) conference and joined the Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps (RRASC) to intern with the National Network of Abortion Funds. She was a founding member of the Badass Activists of the Pioneer Valley, and has volunteered with Planned Parenthood, Feminist Majority, Tapestry Health, and Food Not Bombs, among others.

Chelsea is a member of the Hampshire & Franklin County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts (WFWM) board of directors, and the Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact (LIPPI) advisory council. She also serves as community religious advisor for Jewish students at Smith College. Chelsea lives in Northampton with her husband and has three children ages 4, 10, and 21.



## Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls



**Denise Brown**  
**Northampton, MA**  
B.S., M.S., CIM., LIPPI "15,"  
PhD Student (Capella University)  
Commissioner/Co-Chair



**Francia Wisnewski**  
**Montague, MA**

Francia Wisnewski A 17-year resident of Franklin County, Francia has been a tireless advocate for children, families, women and individuals. She works as the Senior Program Manager for Raising A Reader MA in the Pioneer Valley, focusing her work in supporting families and their children for school readiness success. She has worked for other local nonprofit anti-poverty organizations throughout the years and she continues to volunteer her services in various community initiatives. She is representing the community as a current elected town meeting member. Francia holds a Bachelor's Degree in teaching sciences from Cali, Colombia and a Master's degree in Education from the University of Massachusetts. She also serves on the boards of the Shea Theater and Leadership Pioneer Valley. Before moving to Montague, she served two terms on the Greenfield School Committee, including two terms as Vice-Chair. She is a graduate of the Emerge Massachusetts program.



**Ginetta E.B. Candelario**  
**Smith College**  
**Northampton, MA 01063**

Ginetta Candelario is Professor of Sociology, Latin American & Latina/o Studies and the Study of Women & Gender at Smith College. She has also been engaged in Community Based Learning and Research with Holyoke non-profit organizations since 2009. In addition to being Editor of the scholarly journal *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* housed at Smith and published by Duke University Press, she is author of, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Identity From Museums to Beauty Shops* ( Duke University Press in 2007) which received awards from the Latino Studies Section of the Latin American Studies Association and the New England Council of Latin American Studies. Her edited volume, *Miradas desencadenantes: Los estudios de género en la República Dominicana al inicio del tercer milenio*, the first collection of gender and women's studies research in the Dominican Republic, was published in April of 2005 by FLACSO and INTEC. She also co-edited a two-volume primary documents collection for the Dominican Republic's Archivo General de la Nación, *Cien Años de feminismos dominicanos, 1861-1961*, published in 2016. Her current book project is tentatively titled *Voices Echoing Beyond the Seas: Dominican Feminisms from Transatlantic to Transnational, 1882-1942*. Finally, Ginetta is married to Timothy J.





## Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

Seney and the proud mother of two adult children, Marlena (who is part of the Teach for America Corps in North Carolina) and Christian Candelario Romero (who will be continuing his college education in Massachusetts).



### **Keleigh Pereira Turners Falls, MA**

Keleigh is the Family Self-Sufficiency Director for the Greenfield Housing Authority and Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment. She works on engaging in community organizing & collaboration with a lens for social policy, women's issues, GLBTQ & racial justice equity within systems, programs, and society. She lives in Turners Falls with her children and partner and is currently furthering her education at UMASS, Amherst. She is the co-chair for the Franklin County Resource Network's Public Policy Task Force, is an organizer for Franklin County Pride, Inc., is a trained volunteer for the Center for Community Resilience After Trauma, Incorporator for the United Way of Franklin County, and an elected voting member of Montague's Town Meeting. Keleigh is a proud graduate of the Leadership Institute of Political and Public Impact.



### **Linda-Jeanne M. Mack, MSW, LCSW Easthampton, MA**

LJ is the director of the child welfare adoption program at Berkshire Children and Families in Hadley, MA. She has worked consistently with families involved with the child welfare system and children and youth experiencing foster care for the past nine years. She also works part time as an outpatient clinician at Clinical and Support Options and is an adjunct professor in the Bachelors of Social Work program at Western New England University.



### **Marcia Plant Jackson, MSN, MPA, RN, FNP-C Leverett, MA**

Marcia received her advanced practice degree from Indiana University School of Nursing and her MPA from Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs. She also was adjunct clinical faculty with Indiana University and Ball State University. She has spent time caring for families in school based community health centers as well as numerous specialty programs for the homeless, HIV/AIDS and women's health. Marcia strongly believes that *"healthcare is a right, not a privilege, Healthy people benefit the whole of society."*



## Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls



**Marianne Bullock**  
**Greenfield, MA**

Marianne is the Manager of Community Action's Family Resource Center, currently working with youth and parents involved in the juvenile system and family drug courts in Franklin County, Mass. She is the administer of The Peoples Fund, a mutual aid network providing funds to keep families together in the face of deportation, incarceration and separation. She is founder of The Prison Birth Project a nonprofit prison doula program that operated for 10 years in western mass. She is currently writing curriculum and training birth workers to work specifically with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated pregnant and substance using people.

\* Margot Parrot, Remarks to  
12<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Breakfast  
Franklin County Resource Network  
October 6, 2017

### Speak Up: Amplifying the Voices of Rural Women and Girls

First, thank you to Keleigh Pereira and to the Franklin County Resource Network for inviting me to participate today. I'm very excited to see so many people here, especially our legislators -- and the topic of the day, *Speaking up and amplifying the voices of rural women and girls*, is a subject very close to my heart.

It happens that I am the only member of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women who actually lives on a farm! I think that qualifies as rural. When I introduce myself to people in Eastern Massachusetts, I usually explain that I live just north of their water supply, and I let that sink in for a minute.

Before I talk about ways in which we can amplify our own voices and those of others, I should tell you something about the Commission on which I serve. The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women was created in May 1998 by the Massachusetts legislature, and we began operation in 1999. The legislation was inspired by the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, which heightened the awareness of women's status around the world. The Beijing Conference specifically urged federal and state governments to create Women's Commissions. Our body of commissioners is made up of 19 volunteers of diverse backgrounds, representing all regions of the state, with many different areas of expertise and experience.

Commissioners are appointed by 4 authorities:

- Governor
  - Senate President
  - Speaker of the House
  - Caucus of Women Legislators
  -
- The Commission exists to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Massachusetts.



## Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

- Our mission is to advance women toward full equality in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women.

I should add, that when the original Commission was formed, it didn't occur to legislators to include girls in the title; but we are very aware that we represent women in the broadest sense, at all stages of life, and including members of the LGBTQ community.

The Commission is empowered to:

- Study, review and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth
- Advise executive and legislative bodies on the effect of proposed legislation on women
- Inform leaders of business, education, health care, state and local governments, and the communications media of issues pertaining to women
- Identify and recommend qualified women for positions at all levels of government
- Promote and facilitate collaboration among local women's commissions and among women's organizations in the state

In a nutshell, we are expected to Amplify the Voices of Women and Girls across the Commonwealth. This is a broad charge for 19 volunteer commissioners, most of whom have jobs and families! So how do we do it?

First, we ought to find out what women and girls say they need, if we are to advocate for them. We do this in several ways. Of course, 19 Commissioners all bring their own experiences to the table. Plus we have, at present, 8 regional commissions, who report to us. Their members, whom we appoint, are diverse and represent the population and geography of the particular region. These regional commissions are the result of 8 separate pieces of legislation through the years. Only 3 regions remain unrepresented, and a bill is currently pending in the legislature, S.1119/H.1110: An Act Establishing Three New Commissions on the Status of Women and Girls. This would create the last three regional commissions, effectively covering the state. In Western Mass we currently have a Berkshire CSW, a Hampden CSW, and a Hampshire Franklin CSW. These regional commissions hold meetings open to the public, and the meetings are posted with all the Town Clerks in the particular region. So this is an opportunity for Western Mass women to get involved, by speaking to these regional commissions and by applying to be appointed to these commissions. We receive an annual report from each regional commission; we meet with them twice a year; and we have specific state commissioners assigned as liaisons to each region.

Another way the state commission keeps informed is by holding four public hearings across the state each year. Since my appointment 5 years ago, we have held Western Mass hearings in Greenfield, Northampton, Holyoke, North Adams, and Pittsfield. This October 24<sup>th</sup> we will hold a hearing at Westfield State University. We publish information on our web site about these hearings and I encourage everyone to attend. Our web site, BTW, has been changed by the state, but you can find it by Googling Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, which will also give you our Facebook page.

Some of the issues we have heard about in the past year in these hearings include:



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

Lack of free legal services; Childcare availability and affordability; Lack of youth-specific services to tackle opioid addiction; Unique needs of rural Massachusetts vs. urban MA; North Adams hospital closure and resulting lack of rural maternity services; Lack of public transportation; Lack of detox and stabilization center; reductions in social services funding; Sexual harassment; Impoverishment; State-sponsored retirement; Child abuse; Suicide; Learning disabilities; Bipolar disorder; Sexual abuse; Benzodiazepine addiction; Anti-women/anti-immigrant rhetoric and targeting undocumented immigrants; Support services for breastfeeding; Domestic Violence; Older female homeowners being targeted by insurance companies; Single mothers as an economic issue; Special needs childcare; Medicare; Education; Teenage pregnancy; Sex education; Sexually transmitted Infections; Women's Marches; Homeless women and children; Food insecurity; SNAP benefits; Eviction; Universal healthcare; Planned Parenthood support; Freedoms of the LGBTQ community; Civic education and engagement; "Fake News"; The Living Wage; Access to reproductive healthcare; EOSL funding; Paid family medical leave; Voting in non-presidential elections; Equal pay support; English training for immigrants; Immigrant domestic violence and sexual assault; Women in management; Arts funding cuts; Mental health resources; Climate change; Student loans; human trafficking..... And the list goes on.....

So how do we use our voices to address these issues? As State Commissioners, we look for legislation to support, and we lobby hard for those bills, speaking at hearings and calling legislative offices. We also speak individually to legislators about unaddressed needs, and we create an annual report documenting the testimony from our hearings -- which we hope all legislators will read. We hold an annual Women's Advocacy Day every Spring, when we invite people from across the state to meet with legislators to advocate for women and girls and to tell their stories.

We have a Legislative and Public Policy standing committee which looks at new legislation to advise the full commission on whether to endorse these bills and also whether to make passing the legislation a top priority, since we only have the resources to focus on a few bills at once. Our current list of priority bills includes the following:

### **S.499/H.536: An Act Advancing Contraception Coverage and Economic Security in our State (ACCESS)**

#### **Lead Sponsors: Senator Chandler, Reps. Haddad & Scibak**

This bill would improve women's access to contraceptives throughout the Commonwealth.

### **S.1048/H.2172: An Act Establishing a Family Medical Leave and Temporary Disability Leave Insurance Program**

#### **Lead Sponsors: Senator Spilka and Rep. Gordon**

This bill establishes employee rights to paid family medical leave or temporary disability leave. Supporters of this bill are in the process of collecting the signatures to put it on the 2018 election ballot if the legislature does not act on it.

I've already spoken about:

### **An Act Establishing Three New Commissions on the Status of Women and Girls**

There's also:

### **H.3144: An Act Establishing Just Schedules for Employees**



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

### **Lead Sponsors: Rep. Garballey**

This bill establishes employee rights to additional payment if they are not given sufficient advance notice of any changes to their work schedule. The bill protects employees of the retail, fast food and hotel industries in the Commonwealth.

### **S.545/H.482: An Act Providing for Equitable Coverage in Disability Policies**

#### **Lead Sponsors: Senator Lewis, Rep. Balser**

This bill would end sex discrimination in state-regulated disability insurance policies.

### **S.2128: An Act Relative to Healthy Youth**

#### **Lead Sponsors: Reps. O'Day & Brodeur**

This bill calls for age-appropriate and medically accurate sexual health education in each school district or public school that currently offers sexual health education.

### **S.788/H.2333: An Act to Protect Girls from Genital Mutilation**

#### **Lead Sponsors: Sen. Harriette Chandler & Rep. Sarah Peake**

This bill criminalizes the acts of committing FGM on a child or taking a child in or out of the Commonwealth to commit or to permit another to commit FGM. It also creates a duty in mandated reporters to report this as child abuse.

We've had our legislative victories, as well:

#### **An Act Establishing Pay Equity**

As chair of the Equal Pay Coalition, the MCSW was thrilled that the most comprehensive pay equity bill in the country was signed into law last session. Effective July 1, 2018, the law requires equal pay for comparable work, provides a definition of comparable work, and encourages employers to conduct internal reviews to ensure equitable compensation. It prevents employers from asking people about their previous salary history in the interview process, and it protects employees from termination for discussing their compensation. Now the focus of the Commission has shifted to conducting trainings on implementation of the new law.

#### **An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Pregnant Workers Fairness Act**

Signed into law by the Governor in July of this year, this bill provides safeguards such as requiring reasonable accommodation for employees with the conditions of pregnancy, childbirth and other related aspects. A Western Massachusetts organization, MotherWoman, was largely responsible for the passage of this bill, which shows the power we can have out here if we all work together!

You can join us for our Women's Advocacy Day in May, but you don't have to wait that long to be heard. Here are some action steps you can take:



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

- ❖ Contact your local legislators: remember that your legislators want to hear what you think. It's their job, and they keep that job by continuing to listen to their constituent. You can develop an ongoing relationship with them.
- ❖ Share your story at one of our public hearings. We do listen and we report to the legislature and the Governor. Compelling stories are often the catalyst for action.
- ❖ Submit oral or written testimony in favor of one of our legislative priorities or one of your own. Become familiar with the web site of the Massachusetts Legislature: <https://malegislature.gov/> This is a goldmine of information. If you don't have Internet access at home, which many in the region do not, visit the local library!
- ❖ Write a letter to your local newspaper.
- ❖ Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/MassCSW](https://www.facebook.com/MassCSW)
- ❖ Follow us on Twitter: [@MassCSW](https://twitter.com/MassCSW)
- ❖ Educate others on the issues you care most about. We have many such opportunities in our daily conversations. Especially make sure that younger women and girls understand the history of discrimination which so many of us have experienced.

Remember, the best way to effect change is to start at the local level, because change and innovation trickle up, not down. Massachusetts has long been an incubator for great ideas that other states will eventually adopt – such as the pay history prohibition in our equal pay legislation. We can only hope that the federal government imitates us!

Get involved with your local government, run for local office or apply for appointment to a local board or committee.

You can make a difference in many ways, and it's not that hard. You just have to speak up and tell your story. You may have to do it more than once. But look around this room and you'll see a whole community of people who are willing to listen.

Thank you all for being here!

\*\* Francia Wisnewski, Remarks to  
12<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Breakfast  
Franklin County Resource Network  
October 6, 2017

Speak Up: Amplifying the Voices of Rural Women and Girls

Good morning, I am honored to be here with all of you, Community members, organizations and legislators. Thank you Community Action for allowing this space to focus on a key priority in our area. Thank you Margo for your information on the Commonwealth Commission on the Status of Women.

Between 6 and 7 am I am also starting my day greeting nine chickens and getting the garden bounty for snacks while I am at work.





## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

I am here to talk about the Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of women as an opportunity to improve the lives of women and girls in our region.

I have had great opportunities to interact and support women from diverse backgrounds, to help them find their strength and their voices. It's no news to us that Franklin County has the highest poverty rate in the state.

In 2016 there were 2,993 females head of household, living in the lower income bracket. Many of these women would like to go back to school and increase their odds in the workforce, but their circumstances don't allow a financial capacity to afford education.

Last year 7,299 women over 25 years old, reported earning their high school diploma and 5,317 reported having a Bachelor's degree. Earnings for Franklin County averaged \$38,206. For women, the average is \$32,297 and for women with less than a high school diploma earnings are \$18,315. With a bachelor's degree \$37,937. Men in area average earning \$45,663 and with less than a high school diploma, 20,444.

Other pressing issues: Safe housing, access to quality child care, basic medical care without the worries of high deductibles or expensive medication or just access to reproductive health.

In Franklin County It's easy to be caught in a never ending cycle of poverty and in some case this can become generational, last year 3,037 females were below poverty level.

As citizens of the commonwealth, it's critical to constantly advocate for women's rights, to visit legislators and to keep supporting bills that will make life for women fair and equitable.

We have had opportunities to be visited by the MCSW. Here are the issues that citizens presented in our hearings as constraints in our area:

### **Social Security for Women:**

- women typically earn less than men over a lifetime which means that they are typically able to save less over a lifetime.
- many elderly women have no income other than their social security checks
- the importance of improving the earning potential of younger generations of women so that this cycle does not persist

### **Women's Access to Education:**

- there is a lack of access to transportation and childcare, which means that even if women have access to educational resources, women are finding it difficult to pursue further education
- there is still need for legislative support surrounding these issues. We know that work is in progress.
- there is a need for emphasis on science, math, engineering, and leadership while girls are still young so that they feel more confident and can be competitive in the job market when they are older

### **Access to Other Resources:**

- women in Western MA are isolated in many ways: transportation, lack of internet in certain areas, lack of other resources
- even with education, job opportunities are scarce for women in Western MA
- prospects for leadership or science positions for women are especially bleak
- food insecurity is a very real problem for many women and children in Western MA



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

- the cost of living in Western MA is growing at a much faster rate than the increase in wages
- access to reproductive healthcare including access to abortions is an issue—women in Western MA often lack the transportation required to commute to the nearest facilities that provide abortions

### **Women's Shelters:**

- limited options for women's shelters in Western MA
- victims of domestic abuse often have nowhere to go
- need for transitional housing that is safe
- perhaps co-housing as a possible option for the more rural areas—this has had some success in other states (i.e. Michigan)

### **Childcare and Early Childhood Education:**

- many children in Western MA are from low-income families
- many children live in households whose income could be classified as 100% below the national poverty level
- lack of childcare often prevents parents from finding the work they would need to rise up out of this poverty
- desire for early childhood support for STEM educational resources

### **Healthcare:**

- lack of mental health resources in Western MA
- reduction in resources for healthcare—insurance provides access but not choice
- women cannot always afford their copays

### **Predatory Mortgage Loans:**

- single female heads of households are often targeted for higher rates and worse terms
- foreclosures are a harsh reality for many women

### **Insurance and Healthcare:**

- healthcare expenditures currently make up more than 17% of household income in MA
- there is a need for cost-control measures

### **Women in Prisons:**



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

- 65% of women imprisoned in the Commonwealth are mothers of children under the age of 18
- there is a need to find a solution so that these primary caregivers can continue to care for their children
- there could be alternative sentences that utilize job training, counseling, or drug treatment

### **Child Services:**

- an example was provided of a mother whose children were taken away—she found housing but was unable to get her children back due to the fact that her apartment only had a single room; when she became homeless her children were returned
- this clearly demonstrates that the system is broken

### **Muslim Women in Western MA:**

- many Muslim women living in Western MA feel that they are still faced with additional hardships
- some describe difficulties they have faced in the workplace because people do not want to do business with or receive services from them
- there is a desire for legislation that protects these women

### **Domestic Violence:**

- there is currently a lack of state funding for domestic violence prevention
- some groups are trying to develop safety and recovery plans for women in Western MA but are finding that they do not have the resources that they need

This shows a bleak picture, but there is a great momentum of support and collaboration in our area. When women do well in communities we find that communities overall do better. We must work to raise the community standard for everyone.

As regional commissioners, our role is to review the status of women in our communities and make recommendations regarding policies and programs that would increase their opportunities and equity.

I am humbled by how our collective voices could impact change for future generations of women in the commonwealth, and I appreciate the opportunity we have to serve our community.

It is my pleasure to introduce our regional Commissioners:

Denise Brown (Northampton)

Ginetta Candelario (Northampton)

Linda-Jeanne Mack (Easthampton)

Bonnie MacCracken (Amherst)



## **Hampshire- Franklin Commission on the Status of Women and Girls**

Keleigh Pereira (Turners Falls)

Marcia Plant Jackson (Leverett)

Chelsea Sunday Kline (Northampton)

Francia Wisnewski (Montague)

Anais Surkin (Greenfield)

Since April 25<sup>th</sup>, we have been busy participating in event that strengthen legislation in support of women and girls. We also have been educating ourselves in how to provide strong bonds with our community and how to engage stakeholders in our common journey. Here's some of our potential priorities for the upcoming months:

- Ø Expand statewide leadership, support and empowerment,
- Ø Run public policy groups
- Ø Conduct studies and focus groups
- Ø Engage constituents in reference to the needs of women and girls
- Ø Connect with other commissions to learn best practices and build capacity
- Ø Collect and release data
- Ø Support youth leadership programs
- Ø Keep our area strong for girls and Women
- Ø Ensure inclusion -- that women and girls of color in the community are involved

Please keep us in mind, let's work together and create feasible goals, let's be part of the solution and find pathways to improve the lives of Women and girls. Thank you.