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Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

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WESTFIELD CITY CLERK

Minutes DRAFT

September 10, 2020

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Online via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6895726626?pwd=aDdCTEpPSlkwa2pxd29VZDRqZStkQT09>

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

- Jackson called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM
 - i. Marshall did the role call. Present at the meeting were:
 1. Gabrielle Jackson
 2. Dawn Distefano
 3. Tara Marshall
 4. Michelle Goncalves
 5. Jennifer Metsch
 6. Patty Hallberg
 7. Guests, Jess Hernandez and Elizabeth Dineen and Mary Johnson
 - ii. Absent Shanique Spalding and Lizzy Ortiz

II. Approval of minutes on July 9, 2020

- Metsch moved and Goncalves seconded, all in favor.

III. Chair Report

- Welcomes everyone back after a month off and commends everyone getting ready for the upcoming school year.

IV. Vice Chair Report

- Also a welcome and mentions that it would be good to pay attention about how things are going back to school especially girls wading through the unknown.
- Concerned about college students.

- Pay special attention to seniors, many women have been home alone for 6 months. What can we do to help them not be so separated from the world?
- Distefano mentioned that the state commission is having a public hearing, suggesting to add it to new business.

V. Public Speak Out- two members of public present but never spoke Mary Johnson and Alaina Mango

- Jackson welcomed our special guest Elizabeth Dineen, Executive Director of the YWCA.

HAMPDEN COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS PRESENTS:

September Public Meeting

Thursday, September 10th
6:00PM

Elizabeth G. Dineen, JD
Executive Director
YWCA of Western Mass

- Jackson provided her background bio information. Hallberg welcomed her to the meeting. States Elizabeth works passionately on behalf of women and we are here to learn what they do and how we can help in any way.
- Elizabeth introduced Jess Hernandez who is a social worker that works at YWCA as the director of the sexual assault and violence unit. Named her as a rising star of Western MA. Jess leads the works of ongoing work with survivors of violence and sexual assault.

- Jess discussed what her team does with the YWCA. 24 bilingual hotline, counseling programs, and court advocates. Provides services at women correctional facility. 24 on call medical advocacy for sexual assault victims.
- Dineen said 6 months ago today Governor Baker announced a state of emergency so YWCA went to work to figure out how to provide online services. People in the shelter have to follow very strict guidelines for safety, residents have to eat meals in their rooms so they don't congregate in the cafeteria or living room. Knock on wood no residents or staff have contracted Covid-19. Made sure people and staff have access to Covid tests and make sure everything is clean and hygienic. All the work that Jess does has been able to be remote and the numbers are just as strong as they were before the pandemic when it was in person. Social works have been able to provide therapeutic services to children who are witnesses of violence outside in tents so it is safe and clean for them. Trying to adapt every day to continue providing services while keeping people safe.
- Jess discussed the hotline. In the first month of the pandemic, there was a decrease in calls. The calls they did get seemed to be more severe and calls were longer. This was attributed to people being stuck in the home with their abusers. Numbers started going back to normal about a month after pandemic started. Slight uptick in calls currently but they think that is normal because it is back to school time and tracks with the history of calls. They see the need for shelters increasing and the access to shelters decreasing. Doing advocacy over the phone for hospital visits, haven't gone into the hospitals yet. Saw an increase in youth getting sexually assaulted in the home and an increase in injury from violence. Not able to provide as much emotional support with remote advocacy and getting less demographic info, finds that survivors find it awkward.
- Dineen said the Community Foundation has provided money to house women in hotels, food, and transportation and advocated on their behalf to area businesses for money to assist women who are survivors of domestic violence. State legislators in western MA have been incredibly responsive with any issues and

problems. Said they have been tremendous and supportive and Bakre/Polito has gone above and beyond to support all the shelters in the states especially them. Received thousands of dollars to give to their front line workers working so hard for them while being at risk of getting Covid. Received assistance within 96 hours when they asked for it. Also thanks Congressman Neal and said Lt Gov Polito checks in a lot to see how things are going. Thanks Katie Zobel of Community Foundation for all her help as well. She shared a success story of a woman they just helped move out of a dangerous situation and her three kids into a hotel and then into a shelter and now she is moving into permanent housing with a federal job all within 45 days. We need more shelters for women in dire need. Needs at least 2-3 more shelters in Hampden County alone.

- Metsch asked how they keep up with Covid testing. Every staff member working in residential programs has to get tested. Going to stop the spread sites, free until Sept. 30th.
- Jackson discussed that we would love to have a collaboration or partnership with the Y and would like to discuss that in the future.

VI. Old Business

- Open commissioner seat discussion. Jackson will send it out in the next newsletter. Still time to get the word out about it. Discussed term limits and questioned exactly how many seats are open. Distefano will check in with commissioners.
- Jackson shared her screen to show her ideas for our website. Hoping to get it live and running before the call for applications is over.
- No info on the grant process but we can solicit our own donations if we need anything.
- Jackson asked about coffee chats and if there were any updates. Not much participating at this time, but still want to keep scheduling them to create consistency. Distefano suggested changing it from getting to know a

commissioner to more topic focussed so maybe people will want to go to the chat to discuss a certain issue.

- Discussed receiving our business cards, pens, and banner. Metsch suggested sending pens to people that come to the chats.

VII. New Business

- MA Commission public hearing coming up and survey for parents about remote learning. Distefano discussed the previous MA Commission Public Hearing survey which the main focus was childcare. So they are going to do another one on 9/15/20 6pm-8pm specifically about early education and care.
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mcsw-virtual-public-hearing-child-care-and-education-during-covid-19-tickets-118361511467?aff=ebdssbonlinesearch>
- Fall events and community partnerships stems from the July meeting. Jackson wants to pattern with folks from the community to get them featured in our meeting. Jackson asked who we could feature for the October meeting. Hallberg suggested someone from Square One. Distefano suggested the VP and also suggested the Family Advocacy Center, they serve families impacted by homicide and have a human trafficking division. Metsch suggested a dean of students of a college or someone from a senior center or council on aging. Jackson said to ask people that we reach out to join us if they could provide us a bio and a headshot.
- Jackson gave a reminder that October meeting is the 8th and November is the 12th. October early education and November senior. December is the 10th.
- Mass Media. Metsch reached out to Mass Appeal, no response yet
- Jackson brought up a statewide chair call that she had. Got to meet several people and it seems like it is going to be a regular call. Briefly went over call for applications as well as discussed formal structure and rebranding.
- Jackson has a call with Linda-Jeanne tomorrow with the Hampshire Commission to discuss collaborating about issues with childcare and education. Distefano suggested talking in our October meeting about having our own collaboration

with them to do a public hearing to discuss remote learning etc. Invite her to an October meeting to discuss.

- Hallberg mentioned Nia Rennicks (spelling?) being named new CEO for the Red Cross, asked if anyone knew her and if we could get her to meet.

VIII. Adjournment

- Jackson made a motion to adjourn. Hallberg seconded, all in favor. Meeting ended at 7:38pm.