



## **2022 Commissions for Women in Maryland Virtual Roundtable Meeting**

**Thursday, May 19, 2022**

The Maryland Commission for Women convenes an annual Roundtable Meeting, inviting all the city and county Commissions for Women in the state to share information about their projects, priorities, initiatives and strategies. Commissions for Women (CFWs) are each established independently by the government of a jurisdiction (state, county or city). They are advisory boards to that government, and their commissioners are typically appointed by the executive of that government and serve as volunteers to provide a voice for the women and girls of that jurisdiction into the deliberations of that government. However, each CFW is created differently – some are established by law, some by an executive order; some have funding and staff; some are provided very few public resources to carry out their work.

In Maryland, there are 24 major jurisdictions – 23 counties and Baltimore City. At this time last year, there were 14 local CFWs in the state, in addition to the Maryland Commission for Women. During the year, three jurisdictions re-activated their CFWs – Wicomico County, Cecil County and Baltimore City – bringing the total to 17 county/city CFWs! Only the state of California boasts more.

Fourteen of those 17 CFWs joined the meeting. They received a briefing from Rose Holandez of the U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, and a presentation about the recently published report on Maryland Women and the Impact of the COVID19 Crisis.

Below is a brief summary of the reports of each of the participating CFWs, in alphabetical order.

### **Allegany County** (Michelle Stahlman):

In early May the CFW received a \$10,000 Local Development Council Grant from Allegany County, which is funded in part by the revenues from the Rocky Gap Casino. The CFW applied for this grant to help start its Mentoring Program. The goal is to have a dedicated place where women of all walks of life who are entering or returning to the workforce can come and, with the CFW’s assistance, build a great resume, practice interview skills, obtain an outfit for the interview and possibly a few outfits to start their new journey. The CFW will network and collaborate with other organizations to get this program started and moving forward. The CFW co-sponsored the Board of Education Candidate Forum to help the community learn more about the BoE candidates. It also plans to restart its listening tour throughout the County during community events to get feedback from the community on important topics, and to let the community know about the CFW and how to get in touch with it.

The CFW looks forward to a busy and productive summer.

**Anne Arundel County (Elle Toney):**

The CFW is focused on increasing talent and engagement with new members and building programs that really impact women in this county. It has coordinated donations to a program for formerly incarcerated women and their families, and is focusing on survivorship broadly, hoping to partner with other agencies and organizations. It supports the Dash for Dignity, a yearly fund-raising run for survivors of Human Trafficking. It hopes to establish mentoring programs and wants to educate young women to expand their view of their opportunities and to prepare them for those opportunities.

**Baltimore City (Mariel Shutinya):**

Reactivation of this CFW is in progress right now, with candidates for appointment being interviewed. The City's Office of Equity and Inclusion will host the CFW which will eventually have 19 commissioners. The pool of candidates is excellent, so it is hoped to create a very diverse and talented commission. The office is requesting funding and staff and a budget for the CFW.

**Baltimore County (Amy Blank):**

The CFW was very active during the Maryland General Assembly this year. Among its legislative priorities were the bills addressing Human Trafficking. The CFW has offered a series of Zoom webinars focusing on health and mental health. It collaborates actively with the county's Domestic Violence Task Force. It created a resource guide for incarcerated women returning to the community, and it holds a Women of the year program annually. It is holding a retreat in June to set its priorities and focus for the coming year and would look forward to opportunities to collaborate with all the CFWs in the state.

**Calvert County (Joan Winship):**

Over the past year, the CFW's priorities have been to continue reaching women during and after the pandemic. It had been offering Zoom, hybrid and in-person outside events, including its annual Women's Health Expo, in partnership with the hospital. The Expo was held on the hospital grounds and offered health screenings, car seat checks by the Sheriff's Department, health screening for skin and breast cancer and other conditions, and vaccinations. Approximately 370 women attended. The commission designed and provided webinars on human trafficking, sexual assault, and other issues. It supported a clothing closet for women and girls, collecting donated work-related attire. It has tried to be creative about how to offer a variety of programs and services, including its 19<sup>th</sup> annual Women of the World event which was sponsored in collaboration with the public library and was attended by almost 200.

**Cecil County (Sheila Murphy):**

The newly reactivated CFW just held its first meeting about three weeks ago. Presently seven commissioners have been appointed, but there will eventually be 11. There has been a good deal of support from the County Executive – one of only three women currently elected County Executives in the state. The CFW has created its Facebook page. It was able to secure infant formula and to help with distribution. The Commissioners are gathering as much information as possible about the operation of other CFWs in the state as the CFW develops its own programs and priorities.

**Charles County (Torri Ball):**

This CFW is focusing on partnering with other boards, committees and commissions in the county. During this past year it turned its attention to mental health, including for children, and passing the torch – future leadership development. It hopes to re-open Rosemary's Closet this summer, providing work clothing to low-income women. It will also offer a scholarship for a woman in the county.

**Frederick County (Lakshmi Darbha):**

Before the pandemic, the CFW was focusing on programs for women heads of household. It is hoping to collaborate with other agencies to provide resources for women. It advocates for legislation of concern to women and supported the establishment of a Domestic Violence Coordinating Council in the county. It also supported the establishment of an Immigrant Affairs Commission. The CFW actively supports and participates in the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) and the state-wide Women's Legislative Briefing (WLB).

**Harford County (Jill Hamilton):**

The CFW undertook a major project assessing the lives of women throughout the region and produced a draft report, *Harford County Women's Commission Benchmarking Project 2021*. This report compiles findings pertaining to many areas that have a direct impact on women in the county. At this point in time, our priority includes creating an action plan based upon the 2021 Benchmarking report of priorities and actions that the Commission will be taking for the upcoming year and beyond. The CFW holds community conversations that tackle health issues, including the impact of the pandemic on women (COVID-19). It is also working on addressing other issues that impact women and their families including financial literacy, mental and emotional wellness, health care, sexist language and the negative impact on women (words that hurt!), and human trafficking of body parts.

**Montgomery County CFW (Donna Rojas):**

This CFW has 15 commissioners and a full-time Executive Director with some part time staff support as well. The CFW's priorities for this year are: Women and Health; Women and Leadership; Women and Safety; and Women and the Economy. The CFW's signature event is the annual Women's Legislative Briefing (WLB). This year's theme was *Voting Women Change Everything*. The CFW's newsletter has more than 19,000 subscribers. The County Council has asked for the CFW's advice on the creation of lactation facilities in county buildings. The CFW has conducted several listening tours, and offers virtual programs on careers, self-defense, and health and mental health. Commissioners volunteered at food distribution centers. One high note of the year was a partnership with the Recreation Department for a prom dress and accessory drive.

**Prince George's County (Deborah Wilder):**

This CFW's signature event is its Women's Legislative Briefing (WLB), and it held its successful second annual WLB this year. Its Women Moving Forward initiative focuses on the economy, food insecurity and elder protection and safety. It sponsors the Teen Titan Award Program, with concentration on Entrepreneurship, Sports and Leadership for young women. It also sponsors the Trailblazer Award for an outstanding woman in the county. The CFW has launched a quarterly newsletter, as well, and helped at food distribution sites. It is challenging to operate in the pandemic environment. Virtual programs can reach more participants but lack the in-person connection. Bureaucratic issues make it difficult to keep a website up to date and to maintain a Facebook presence. The CFW is hoping to change its charter so that it is either located in the County Executive's Office, or established as an office of its own, not within a larger agency or department.

**Washington County** (Shadae Paul):

This CFW has two primary areas of focus: Health and Wellness, which includes promoting women's health throughout the county and connecting into national and international health initiatives; and Financial Empowerment and Women in Business, which includes a Women's Empowerment Expo.

The Commission is adapting to digital platforms, with a substantial social media push to increase awareness of the CFW, using Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. It is also exploring the pandemic's impact on the mental health of girls, partnering with Girls Inc. to offer four sessions focusing on girls' mental health and wellness. It is also partnering with Hope Centered Mission to deliver meals during the holidays. It led a six-part financial literacy series at a residential recovery center. This year is the CFW's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and it is focusing the commemoration on the theme of "Dreamers, Doers and Encouragers."

**Wicomico County** (Katherine Jones):

It took a year to get the CFW up and running but it has been provided no funding or administrative support. It has developed and adopted bylaws and will begin meeting face-to-face. Plans are to request at least some administrative support and to recruit active, committed commissioners. Support and advice from other CFWs would be welcome.

**Worcester County** (Coleen Colson):

The Worcester County Commission for Women is awaiting County Commissioners to appoint replacements for the two vacant positions on its creative team. The CFW has a few priority areas it will continue focusing on that it believes are strong, successful, and can be expanded further to support women of the county. The CFW will continue with the Supporting Domestic Violence Warriors Initiative. This consists of supporting women and children who are residents of the Domestic Violence Safe Shelters of Life Crisis. Another initiative is the creation of a Worcester County Directory of Women-Owned Businesses, with the intention of an electronic and print version of the directory. The CFW will continue its Empowering Women Scholarship program aimed towards female high school seniors. Unfortunately, the pandemic has lessened the dollar amount of the scholarships offered; however, the CFW wanted to continue this important opportunity for youth. The CFW is exploring other county initiatives and plans to grow its "Friends of the Worcester County Commission for Women" to fundraise more as opportunities arise. Thank you all for such wonderful efforts to support all women across Maryland.

**Maryland Commission for Women** (Yun Jung Yang):

The Maryland Commission for Women has 25 commissioners from all across the state. One of its most important projects has been the research on the Status of Women in Maryland. All the CFWs in the state collaborated with the MCW on the *Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour*, which wrapped up in 2018.

The second phase of the research, collecting demographic data that further describe the circumstances of women in our state was launched in 2020. *Maryland Women: A Status Report* was published in June 2021, and research on the impact of the pandemic on Maryland women began immediately after, culminating in *At the Heart of the Pandemic – Maryland Women and the COVID19 Crisis*, published just last month.

Each year, the MCW inducts five women into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame – women whose contributions and achievements are of historic significance. One of the 2022 honorees attended tonight's meeting – Bea Rodgers, who is also a member of the Prince George's County Commission for Women. Her biography, and the biographies of all the more than 200 women who have been inducted since 1985 can be found on the website of the [Maryland State Archives](#).

The MCW is also the sponsor of the Maryland Young Women Leaders Awards, including a \$500 scholastic award, presented to five high school students with records of academic excellence, extraordinary community service and outstanding leadership. The Call for Nominations for both the Hall of Fame and the Young Women Leaders Awards will go out in early October.

The MCW maintains an active Policy and Legislative Action Committee that acts on its legislative agenda for the year. One of the MCW's continuing priorities is to support the work of the county and city CFWs in our state. Convening the annual CFW Roundtable Meeting is one strategy for carrying out that initiative.