

MARYLAND COMMISSION *for* WOMEN



ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026



MCW Annual Report

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Message from the Secretary

Maryland Department of Human Services

Stacy L. Rodgers, MPA



On behalf of the Maryland Department of Human Services, I am honored to present the 2026 Annual Report of the Maryland Commission for Women. Marking its second full year under the leadership of Executive Director Ariana Kelly, the Commission has significantly expanded its footprint — scaling community outreach, hosting impactful events, and driving research and policy work to empower women and girls across our state.

Under the leadership of the Moore-Miller Administration, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the Maryland Commission for Women's core mission of advancing opportunity and equity for all Marylanders. This year, the Commission deepened its impact by building key cross-agency partnerships. They collaborated closely with the Office of the First Lady to honor women's accomplishments, the Maryland Department of Health and Maryland Higher Education Commission to advance access to contraception, and the Department of Aging to research programs that would financially support caregivers. These partnerships have ensured that the diverse needs of women across the state are addressed comprehensively.

Health and economic opportunity are interconnected, and Maryland continues to lead the way. This year, the Commission championed landmark legislation on menopause care, establishing Maryland as a national pioneer on an essential women's health and economic security issue that has too long been overlooked. By supporting women through every stage of their professional and personal lives, we are strengthening our workforce and setting a high standard for the nation.

These achievements are especially vital today. As national trends point to widening wage gaps and mounting barriers to accessing essential women's healthcare, Maryland stands firm. I am proud of the progress the Maryland Commission for Women has made this year, actively advocating for increased economic opportunity, pay equity, and health protections for women and their families.

Together with our sister agencies, community partners, and dedicated advocates, we will continue building a Maryland where everyone has the resources and freedom to thrive.

In service,

Stacy L. Rodgers, MPA

Acting Secretary

Maryland Department of Human Services

Message from Chair and Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present the Maryland Commission for Women's Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Report. This report reflects the second year of the Commission's three-year revitalization plan. Building on the administrative accomplishments of Fiscal Year 2025, this year we focused on expanding our programmatic capacity by strengthening our research and policy initiatives, developing an active subcommittee structure, and increasing our publications, events, and public engagement.



Dr. LaShaune Stitt
Chair



Ariana Kelly
Executive Director

Over the past year, the Commission expanded relationships with women's organizations, government agencies, legislators, and local commissions across Maryland while creating new opportunities for Commissioners to take on leadership roles. Additional staff capacity and an expanded internship program enabled us to pursue more ambitious research and policy initiatives and deepen our commitment to public education and community engagement.

Fiscal Year 2026 was marked by a significant increase in Commission-hosted events, including our Local Commissions for Women Convening, 60th Anniversary Celebration, Women's Issues Advocacy Night, Maryland Women's Hall of Fame induction ceremony, and educational programs focused on critical issues affecting women across the state. We also continued to expand our publications and strengthen the Commission's role as a trusted resource for legislators, advocates, and state agencies seeking policy solutions.

This year, the Commission conducted research on menopause policy, built new coalitions, and coordinated legislative advocacy efforts. By aligning our policy priorities with our events, communications, and outreach activities, we ensured that every aspect of our work advanced a shared mission. The Commission's revitalized subcommittee structure empowered Commissioners to lead publications, events, and special initiatives, while partnerships with statewide organizations and local commissions expanded our reach and impact.

We also continued our investment in future leaders. Through our internship, fellowship, and student research programs, undergraduate and graduate students contributed to research projects focused on the Commission's policy priorities, helping to shape the future of our work.

As we look ahead to Fiscal Year 2027, we remain committed to building on the partnerships and policy work established this year. Our goal is to strengthen the Commission's role as a central hub for women's rights within Maryland state government while continuing to advocate for the resources necessary to fulfill our statutory mission.

We are deeply grateful to our Commissioners, staff, interns, partners, and supporters whose dedication made these accomplishments possible. Together, we are building a stronger future for women across Maryland.

Sincerely,

Dr. LaShaune Stitt, Chair & Ariana Kelly, Executive Director

Commission Leadership and Membership



Commissioners, July 2025 - June 2026

LaShaune Stitt, Ed.D., Chair

Patricia McHugh Lambert, Esq., First Vice Chair

Christine Lee, Ph.D., Pharm.D., Second Vice Chair

Tazeen Ahmad, M.A.

Pier Blake, MBA, M.S.

Judy A. Carbone, M.Ed.

Gloria Dent

Tekisha Dwan Everette Ph.D., MPA, MPH, CPH

Maggi G. Gaines, M.A., M.Ed.

Linda Han

Jodi Kelber, Ph.D.

Joyce King, Esq.

Sarah Ackerstein Klein, JD, M.A.

Gabriela D. Lemus, Ph.D

Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Ph.D.

Fiona Oliphant, JD

Stacey A. Rebbert, M.A.

Nykidra "Nyki" Robinson, MPA

Michelle Siri, Esq.

Nichelle Schoultz

Monica Watkins

About the Commission

The Maryland Commission for Women (MCW) is an independent state agency established in 1965. Now celebrating more than sixty years of advancing solutions for Maryland women, the Maryland Commission for Women is housed within the Department of Human Services.

The Commission is a 25-member advisory board, with Commissioners appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Maryland State Senate. Half of the Commissioners are nominated as representatives of women's organizations across the state. The other half are individuals with expertise in women's rights research and advocacy. The vision of the Commission is executed by a four person staff and a dedicated team of volunteers and interns.

The legislative mandate of the Commission is to work directly with government agencies, community organizations, and the public to:

- Advise the executive and legislative branches of government
- Direct attention to critical problems facing women
- Recommend methods of overcoming discrimination
- Support women's representation and encourage women in seeking public office
- Secure recognition of women's accomplishments
- Serve as a statewide clearinghouse for women's rights activities

In 2026 our statute was updated to recognize the Commission works in partnership with Maryland's 17 local Commissions for Women and other statewide women's rights organizations.

Meet the Staff

The Commission for women has four full-time staff members. We also have a Fellowship and internship program supported by the Foundation for the Maryland Commission for Women.



The Honorable Ariana Kelly, Executive Director

Ariana Kelly took the helm of the Commission for Women after a 14 year career in the Maryland legislature where she served on the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and as Vice Chair of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. She was

lead sponsor of more than one hundred pieces of successful legislation and two dozen Commission for Women priority bills. In addition to her legislative service, Ariana has had an extensive career in women's rights advocacy having served as National Campaign Director for MomsRising, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland, and Executive Producer for PBS' To The Contrary. She also serves as an Adjunct Professor of State Health Policy at George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health.

Anecia Evans, Policy and Program Assistant

Anecia joined the Commission in May 2026 bringing advocacy and program management experience intersecting women's policy, grassroots mobilization, and international development. In 2026 she served as a committee analyst within Maryland Senate President Ferguson's office tracking Finance Committee proceedings. Her wealth of cross-cultural experience ranges from a UN emergency response unit to local grassroots organizing, and she holds degrees from Spelman College, SOAS University of London, and George Washington University.

Genesis Franco, Management Associate

Genesis joined the Commission in November 2024. In addition to managing MCW finance and operations, Genesis is the face of our office for Commissioner and public engagement and lead staff person on the Commission newsletter, Maryland Women's Hall of Fame, County Commissions for Women and Latino/Hispanic outreach. Genesis has an extensive background in healthcare administration and customer service.

Brett Jordan, Program Manager

Brett joined the Commission in May 2025 to lead programming, including the Over-The-Counter Birth Control Collaborative, menopause policy work, and our research internship program. Brett brings deep expertise in reproductive health and insurance coverage, as well as the skills to execute the research and reports for the MCW's wide range of policy interests. She has a master's degree in public policy from the Heller School Brandeis University.

Fellows and Interns**Alex Mayen Velasquez, Program Intern**

Passionate about gender equity and advocacy, particularly as it relates to Hispanic women and families, Alex is supporting the Commission's work through research and engagement on issues affecting women and girls across Maryland. A graduate of Howard County Community College, Alex will be transferring to University of Maryland Baltimore County in the fall. After earning her Bachelor's degree, Alex intends to pursue a law degree.



Taryn Graves; Hannah Bresleau and Alex Mayen Velasquez.

Hannah Breslau, Foundation Coordinator

Hannah served as Foundation Coordinator, taking on significant planning work for the October 2025 60th Anniversary event as well as assisting with other program and policy work. Hannah brought a passion for reproductive health and rights to her work, as well as a drive to learn more about women's rights and Maryland politics. Hannah graduated in May 2026 with her MPP from the University of Maryland and has since taken a position as Development Associate for Miriam's Kitchen.

Taryn Graves, Graduate Research Assistant

Taryn Graves joined the Commission for the 2025-26 academic year to assist with research and report writing. Taryn brought her expertise in reproductive health policy to the work of the OTC Collaborative, where she spearheaded the history sections of the Interim Report. Taryn graduated in May with her MPP from George Washington University and continues her work as Policy Coordinator for Physicians for Reproductive Health.

Policy & Research

The Policy Subcommittee, Chaired by Commissioner Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, led the Commission's research and policy development initiatives. Priorities this year were developing and strengthening partnerships with state agencies and developing a student research program focused on issues related to women's economic security. The Policy committee also published and distributed an updated factsheet on Justice Involved Women in Maryland, and facilitated multiple public events on menopause and women's economic security.

Our Special Projects Subcommittee, Chaired by Commissioner Christine Lee, worked to implement two pieces of legislation intended to advance contraception access across Maryland. This committee also led statewide research and outreach on menopause, informing the development of the successful menopause legislation.

State Agency Partnerships



Commission staff and leadership with DHS Acting Secretary Human Services Stacy Rodgers.
From left: Christine Lee, Brett Jordan, Ariana Kelly, Secretary Rodgers, Genesis Franco, Chair LaShaune Stitt, and Judy Carbone.

Maryland Department of Human Services

The Maryland Commission for Women is housed within the Department of Human Services. DHS provided the Commission with financial and technical support to allow us to fulfill our mission. DHS provides our meeting space, technology support, budget infrastructure, human resources and communications support. In FY26 they went above and beyond to ensure the Commission could hire and maintain our staff and interns, support our incoming Commissioners and partner organizations, and communicate effectively. We are truly appreciative of their support.

Maryland Department of Aging Economic Security in Retirement

The Maryland Commission for Women met with Secretary Carmel Roques and the Department of Aging to explore strategic partnerships focused on women's lifelong economic security. Public Policy Chair Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz and student Caitlin Hassan presented research on adult caregiving barriers, proposing state-run long-term care insurance and direct financial support modeled after programs in Washington and Hawaii. Moving forward, the Commission looks forward to identifying concrete opportunities for future collaboration with the Department of Aging.



L-R: Leslie Smith-Ray, Andrea Nunez, Caitlin Hassan, Chair LaShaune Stitt, Secretary of Aging Carmel Roques, Executive Director Ariana Kelly, Commissioner Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, and Jennifer Crawley.

Maryland Department of Health

The Commission partners with the Maryland Department of Health through our Over-the-Counter Contraception Collaborative, Campus Birth Control Access Program and our menopause work.

Over-the-Counter Birth Control

MDH experts in both the Medicaid and Family and Community Health Services Departments have been regular participants and thought partners in the Over-the-Counter Contraception Access Collaborative, working to develop implementable recommendations for a final report due to the Governor and legislature in December 2026.

Menopause Program

Commission Executive Director Ariana Kelly was selected to serve on the MDH menopause working group to implement House Bill 1365, and MDH will be partnering with the Commission on community outreach initiatives in the year ahead.

Maryland Higher Education Commission

Ensuring Birth Control Access on Campus

As conveners of women's health policy work, the Commission and its Foundation have taken an active role in implementing access to OTC birth control on college campuses. In addition to directly supporting community college campuses in their implementation work, the Commission facilitated connections between MHEC, national experts, and campus leaders and brought together stakeholders to develop guidance regarding student access to reproductive health services. The Commission also led advocacy on SB 532/HB 1076, which clarified requirements for two- and four-year colleges.

Legislative Briefing: Over the Counter Birth Control Programs



L-R: ASEC Executive Director Kelly Cleland, Ariana Kelly, Former MHEC Secretary Sanjay Rai, and Emily Dow, MHEC Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs.

Ariana Kelly and Brett Jordan joined former MHEC Secretary Sanjay Rai to brief the House Health Committee in February 2026 to brief Committee members on both the Over-the-Counter Birth Control Collaborative and campus programs to provide OTC birth control. Committee members were supportive of both programs and especially interested in how campus programs benefit young people.

University of Maryland College Park

Student Research Program

Commissioners and the Commission staff worked closely with undergraduate and graduate students on seven research projects this year. Student research was shared on the Maryland Commission for Women website and directly through presentations to policy makers and advocacy organizations.

- In the fall semester, Executive Director Ariana Kelly and Policy and Program Assistant Camille Fabiyi worked with a group of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Maryland on a single-semester group project assessing the feasibility of universal home visits for postpartum families as a follow up to SB 156/HB 334 Workgroup on Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services, sponsored by Senator Karen Lewis Young and Delegate Kenneth Kerr.
- In the spring, Ariana and Commissioner Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz supervised four undergraduate and graduate students conducting independent study projects on women's economic security across the lifespan.
- The Commission for Women supervised the year-long capstone projects of two graduate students in the school of public policy at the University of Maryland. Program Manager Brett Jordan met with each student every other week and reviewed their work throughout the year, serving as mentor, with the Commission for Women as their client.



Ariana Kelly with student researcher Kaylee Mendoza-Diaz.

Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

“Let’s Talk Civilly – Advancing the Needle: A Conversation on Women’s Equity”



Ariana Kelly speaks on the podcast.

Executive Director Ariana Kelly was featured on the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) Let’s Talk Civilly podcast to discuss women’s rights. In this episode, Markyta Sirett and Gabriela Cortez discuss with Ariana the Commission’s 60th year and its future direction. The conversation explores women’s rights legislative work and ongoing efforts to advance equity policy, including reproductive freedom, wage transparency, and Maryland’s care economy.

Sexual Harassment

In the coming year the Commission for Women will partner with the MCCR to research trends in sexual harassment complaints in Maryland.

Maryland State Archives

Maryland Women's Hall of Fame

The Commission partnered with the State Archives on two projects. Our ongoing partnership with the Archives to house the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame saw eight new members inducted this year. See page 35 for more information.

60 Years of Progress Archive

The Archives also worked with the Commission for Women Foundation to locate and digitize the Commission for Women's archives. This includes dozens of reports from our 60 year history. It also includes newsletters and meeting minutes that tell the story of the first 60 years of Commission for Women accomplishments.



Office of the Comptroller



Left: Ariana Kelly, Tisha Edwards, and other stakeholders at the Women's Economic Security Advisory Council kickoff event. Right: Comptroller Brooke Lierman.

Commission Executive Director Ariana Kelly was appointed to Comptroller Brooke Lierman's Women's Economic Security Advisory Council, ensuring the Commission expertise will be available to inform the Comptroller's work on women's issues.

Women's Rights Legislative Breakfast

In April, the Office of the Comptroller also partnered with the Commission for Women, Executive Alliance, Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women and Emerge Maryland to host a Women's Rights Legislative Breakfast. The event brought together advocates and leaders for a discussion on key legislative priorities and issues impacting women across Maryland.

Women's Economic Security Roundtable

Comptroller's office staff Dani DiPietro and Annie Alexander presented preliminary research on women's economic opportunity to the Commissioners at our June meeting. The presentation provided an overview of the Comptroller's new report on women's economic security, including its labor force participation trends, business ownership and entrepreneurship, state spending with women-owned businesses, women in corporate lead-



L-R: Ariana Kelly, Rebecca Snyder, Comptroller Brooke Lierman, Second Vice Chair Christine Lee, Amanda Rodriguez, and Alice Cain.

ership and on boards of directors, and women's financial security. The roundtable afforded Commissioners the opportunity to provide feedback on the preliminary research and inform the qualitative component of the report. The Commission for Women is appreciative to the Comptroller and her staff for including their voices and seeking their expertise in their outreach.

Office of First Lady Dawn Flythe Moore

The Commission for Women was honored to strengthen our longstanding partnership with First Lady Dawn Flythe Moore through two events this year. Maryland's First Lady started her public service career as an intern at the Commission for Women and her support of the Commission has been instrumental for our success.

The Maryland Women's Hall of Fame Induction



First Lady Dawn Moore with honorees, left to right: Wendy Chun-Hoon, Ellie Dayhoff-Brannigan (on behalf of her grandmother, Margaret Oakley Dayhoff), Jamie Hampton (on behalf of her aunt, Sharon Camp), Susan Wolf Turnbull, Elda Devarie, Senator Delores Kelley, Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi (on behalf of her mother, Annunciata D'Alesandro), and Vicki and Daniel Perez (on behalf of their daughter, Lt. Emily Perez).

On March 30, 2026, the Maryland Commission for Women, in partnership with First Lady Dawn Flythe Moore and the Maryland State Archives, proudly inducted eight extraordinary women into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame. The annual ceremony, held during Women's History Month at Government House, honored women whose remarkable contributions to public service, science, health, advocacy, education, and civic leadership have left a lasting impact on Maryland and beyond. The 2026 inductees, Sharon Camp, Senator Delores Kelley, Susan Wolf Turnbull, Lieutenant Emily J.T. Perez, Elda M. Devarie, Wendy Chun-Hoon, Annunciata "Nancy" Lombardi D'Alesandro, and Dr. Margaret Oakley Dayhoff, were recognized for their exceptional achievements and enduring contributions to their communities and the state of Maryland.

Film Screening of The M Factor 2

On May 26th, in collaboration with the First Lady's office, Executive Alliance, and other stakeholders, the Commission brought together women's rights leaders and women business leaders to a screening and panel discussion of the documentary The M Factor 2: Before the Pause.

Panelists Ariana Kelly, film producer Denise Pines, and menopause expert Dr. Sharon Malone answered questions from moderator Tisha Edwards regarding the film, the menopause legislation signed that day, and the policy and cultural shifts needed to support women experiencing perimenopause and menopause. The event served as both a celebration of the new law and as a kickoff to the year-long research and public awareness campaign that the Commission will lead.

Legislative Implementation: Reproductive Health



Dr. Cynthia Baur and Aliyah Nuri Horton, framing the cover of the Interim Report of the Collaborative.

Collaborative to Advance Implementation of Over the Counter Birth Control

During the 2025 legislative session, Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk and Senator Shelly Hettleman sponsored legislation creating the Collaborative to Advance Implementation of Over-the-Counter Birth Control, to be convened and staffed by the Commission for Women.

During FY 26, the Commission facilitated the appointment of Collaborative members, led by co-chairs Dr. Cynthia Baur and Aliyah Nuri Horton. The Commission convened six meetings; and published an interim report in December 2025.

The report highlighted the history of contraceptive access in the state, including the need for further policy and programmatic change in order to fully implement insurance coverage. It also offered two interim recommendations regarding billing procedures and public education. The final report, to be submitted in December 2026, will include a comprehensive set of recommendations for further action by state agencies and the General Assembly.

The Collaborative interim recommendations are:

1. State agencies, including the Maryland Insurance Administration, Department of Health, Medicaid Program, and State Employee Health Program, should advance guidance to pharmacies, pharmacy benefit managers, and health plans regarding a consistent billing method for insurance coverage of OTC contraceptive products. OTC contraceptive products include, but are not limited to, levonorgestrel emergency contraception, the opill, and condoms.

2. The state should inform and educate Marylanders about OTC birth control access by activating all relevant existing partnerships and seeking out new partnerships within and outside of state government.

Straus Foundation Partnership to Advance Campus Reproductive Health Care

Commission Executive Director Ariana Kelly, Chairman Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan and Delegate Stephanie Smith sponsored legislation requiring both two- and four-year campuses to implement reproductive health care access plans on campus. These programs allow students to plan their reproductive futures and complete their studies. The Commission and its associated foundation have worked closely with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the American Society for Emergency Contraception (ASEC), and community colleges to support the implementation of contraceptive access programs on their campuses. The requirements came out of HB 477/SB 341 of 2023 and HB 367/SB 527 of 2024.

Community colleges shared at a June 2025 convening hosted by MHEC that funding for OTC products, and for wellness vending machines as a method of providing them, represented the biggest barrier to implementation. The Maryland Commission for Women reached out to the Straus Foundation and secured a grant to support implementation of this legislation.

ASEC, the Commission, and our Foundation worked with the Straus Foundation to administer pass-through grants of up to \$10,000 to campuses interested in installing a vending machine on their campuses. Eight campuses applied and were each awarded \$10,000 to spend in FY 26 toward vending machine installation and required products.

Brett met weekly with ASEC staff to strategize, evaluate applications, and troubleshoot any barriers that schools faced. Brett and ASEC also met with schools throughout the year to check in on implementation progress, answer questions, and offer technical assistance. Brett presented at an MHEC convening in November 2025 regarding the grant program and OTC contraceptive access requirements. Institutions will submit their final reports in early FY 27, including the positive impact that OTC access has on their campuses.



Program Manager Brett Jordan at the MHEC convening, with interns Alex Mayen Velasquez and Hannah Breslau.

Commission for Women Research:

Justice Involved Maryland Women: A 2025 Status Report

In October, the Commission published an update to the decennial State of Women in Maryland (SWIM) report, focusing on justice-involved women. The topic was selected in collaboration with advocacy organizations working in Maryland on issues impacting women.

This fact sheet includes statistics and trends specifically for women involved with the correctional system in Maryland, including the offenses for which they are most likely to be arrested and the demographics of the average woman serving time in the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women. Key findings:

- While the overall rate of incarceration dropped leading up to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has slowly risen over the last few years.
- Women are disproportionately arrested for theft related offenses. In 2023, 12% of those arrested for shoplifting and larceny were women, and only 7% are men.
- Women serving sentences in MCI-W are disproportionately likely to be Black (60% of incarcerated women and approximately 30% of all Maryland women) and from Baltimore City or County.

The complete [Justice Involved Women](#) Fact Sheet can be downloaded at the Commission for Women website.



JUSTICE-INVOLVED

Maryland Women:

A 2025 Status Report

Women involved with the justice system far too often fall between the cracks. They represent a small fraction of both incarcerated people and of the overall population of Maryland women, and discussions of each population frequently fail to include them. The Maryland Commission for Women is dedicated to bringing all Maryland women's stories to the forefront. This brief report updates our picture of women in Maryland involved

with the justice system, highlighting those who have been arrested or incarcerated.

Maryland has one facility that houses women convicted of a criminal offense. The Maryland Correctional Institution - Women (MCIW) is located in Jessup, Maryland, which straddles Howard and Anne Arundel counties. While women awaiting trial may be housed in other facilities, all women serving a state sentence do so at the MCIW.

NUMBER OF WOMEN ARRESTED FOR VARIOUS CRIMES IN MARYLAND (2023)

OFFENSE	NUMBER OF FEMALE ARRESTS	% OF ALL FEMALE ARRESTS	% OF TOTAL ARRESTS FOR THAT OFFENSE
Theft (larceny, shoplifting, etc)	2951	12%	34%
Assault (simple or aggravated)	5690	23%	31%
Homicide	1	1%	77%
Drug-related (narcotic and alcohol-related)	4551	18%	24%

In 2023, the highest proportion of women (as compared to men) were arrested for theft-related offenses, accounting for 12% of all female arrests and 7% of male arrests. The largest number of women serving sentences were convicted of homicide, due primarily to the length of sentences for serious violent crimes. Therefore, women convicted of more minor offenses are less likely to be incarcerated at any given time, even though there are more of them.

THE AVERAGE WOMAN IN MCIW IN 2025:

AGE	RACE	JURISDICTION	LENGTH OF SENTENCE	LENGTH OF STAY
38.3	Black	Baltimore City	79.7 months	58.1 months

Student Research:

Women's Economic Security Across the Lifespan

The inaugural year of our student research program was extremely successful, resulting in seven student research projects that will inform the Commission's ongoing policy work on women's economic security. All of our sponsored student research is available on the Maryland Commission for Women student research website. In FY27 we hope to enter into partnerships with additional Maryland academic institutions, using student research and ingenuity to develop our long-term policy and programmatic priorities.

Child Care Access & Affordability Research

Childcare Scholarships & Subsidies

Kaylee Mendoza-Diaz studied child care affordability and access and presented three new policy options based on programs in other states: funding to build affordable family child care homes based on Colorado's Rural Homes Initiative; employer-funded child care programs that take the financial burden off parents similar to a Missouri's program; and a phased-in universal child care program modeled after New Mexico's. That program would focus on training child care providers and supporting them in starting new businesses, before turning to support consumers/parents.

Expanding Childcare Access for Student Parents in Maryland

Abigail Letocha focused on child care access and affordability for students at Maryland public colleges and universities. Her research found that formal child care arrangements are often out of reach for students due to finances and their class schedules. Her research was shared with Senator Mary Washington and Delegate Kenneth Kerr, sponsors of the pregnant and parenting students legislation.

Women's Economic Security Research

Caregiver Supports Proposal: Addressing Maryland's Family Caregiver Crisis

Caitlin Hassan studied the financial impact of caregiving on women. She recommended a state-run long term care insurance program, like that of Washington State, and direct financial support to caregivers, like Hawaii's program. She also urged Commission support for the 2026 bill SB 809/HB 1280 Supporting Our Caregiver Infrastructure Program that created a feasibility study being conducted by the Smith School of Business due in 2028. Her research was presented in a meeting with Secretary of Aging Carmel Roques and to Delegate Lesley Lopez, Chair of the House Long Term Care Subcommittee.

Advancing Women's Economic Security in Maryland: State Policy Approaches to Improve Pay Equity

Kayla M. Joyce studied state policy approaches to improve pay equity and advance women's economic security, focusing specifically on undervalued healthcare support occupations where women represent 86% of the workforce. Her research found Maryland women face a \$9,093 annual gender earnings gap driven largely by low wages and occupational crowding in essential sectors. To combat these systemic inequities, she identified the possibility of strengthening collective bargaining rights through card check union recognition and expanding public workers' right to strike.

Women's Retirement Readiness in Maryland

Megan Mulligan studied retirement readiness for Maryland women, noting challenges related to wage gaps, longer life expectancy, and limited retirement savings, with many women concerned about outliving their savings. She identified the Department of Aging's Longevity Ready Maryland program and the Treasurer's Maryland Saves program as promising avenues to address the systemic issues preventing women from adequately saving for retirement. She also highlighted possible methods of bolstering the Maryland Saves program, including state-funded contributions to individual retirement plans and tying it to the state's Earned Income Tax Credit to better assist low-income Marylanders. Through Megan's research, the Commission for Women identified retirement readiness as a priority area for outreach and education in FY27.



Student researcher Kayla Joyce (right) meets with Economic Matters Committee Chair Kris Valderamma. Left to right: Ariana Kelly, Tazeen Ahmad, Economic Matters Committee Chair Kris Valderamma, Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Kayla Joyce.

Women's Health Research

Rights Without Means Are Not Rights: Operationalizing Insurance Coverage at the Retail Counter for over-the-counter contraceptives in Maryland

Clara Miller studied the feasibility of retail counter coverage for over-the-counter contraception as part of the Commission's broader over-the-counter contraception work. She found that retail counter coverage will require policy and infrastructure investment in order to be effective. This research will be incorporated into the final report of Maryland's Over-the-Counter Contraceptive Access Collaborative.

Assessing Maryland's Approach to Maternal and Newborn Health: Legislative Barriers and Policy Alternatives

University of Maryland students **Kristen McCurdy, Trevor Guesno, Dylan Harvey** reviewed the costs and benefits of multiple approaches to expanding home visiting for postpartum mothers and recommended that Maryland approach newborn health with a multi-pronged strategy, expanding the role of community health workers in this field as well as center-based support for mothers and their babies.



Program Manager Brett Jordan with graduate students Abigail Letocha and Clara Miller at their capstone presentations at the University of Maryland College Park.

Legislative Advocacy

The Legislative Subcommittee, chaired by Maggi Gaines, developed the Commission's legislative agenda, organized our "Night in Annapolis" event, and submitted written and oral testimony on numerous pieces of legislation. This committee also oversaw the publication of our second Legislative Session Women's Issues Report tracking the progress of dozens of bills to advance women's rights in Maryland.

In 2026, the Commission for Women was lead advocate on three successful pieces of legislation. We also supported legislation championed by partner organizations including the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women, Women's Law Center, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence and Women Legislators of Maryland.



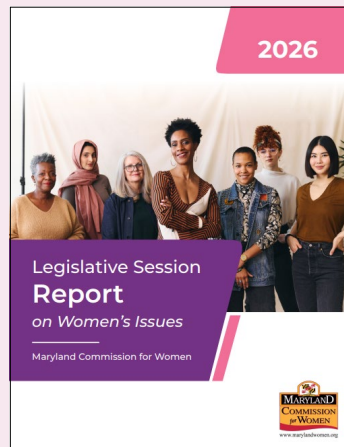
Commissioners Gloria Dent and Christine Lee with Executive Director Ariana Kelly.

Legislative Session Reports on Women's Issues:

As a service to the women's rights advocacy community and other interested stakeholders, the Maryland Commission for Women tracks the progress of legislation affecting women throughout the legislative session. This year, the Commission tracked the progress of more than 50 pieces of legislation. For the first time this year, we issued a Crossover report distributed electronically to update advocates on the progress of legislation in the final weeks of session.

Following the conclusion of the General Assembly's work in Annapolis, we published our 2026 Legislative Session Report on Women's Issues to track the state's latest policy shifts impacting women. This comprehensive guide documents more than 30 newly passed laws, including changes to the childcare scholarship program and expanded penalties for female genital mutilation. Beyond celebrating these victories, the report maps out upcoming state deadlines through 2028 and identifies the top five bills that fell short this year but are expected to return next session.

This document serves as a roadmap for advocates, researchers, and service providers tracking the health, safety, and economic security of Marylanders. The complete analysis and individual bill tracking data are available for review within the full standalone publication.



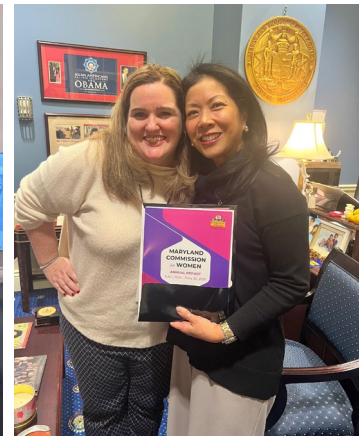
Commission Night in Annapolis

In February, the Maryland Commission for Women hosted a Night in Annapolis, bringing together Commissioners and legislators to discuss the Commission's 2026 Policy Priorities. 12 Commissioners had meetings with 10 legislative leaders including Delegate Heather A. Bagnall, Delegate Sarah Wolek, Senator Mary Washington, Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Delegate Kriselda Valderrama, Delegate Stephanie M. Smith, Delegate Emily K. Shetty, Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Senator Shelly Hettleman, and Senator Dawn Gile to thank them for their leadership on critical issues for Maryland women.

Commissioners also discussed priorities impacting women and families, including childcare access, healthcare, economic security, protections for survivors of violence, and support for women throughout all stages of life. The event provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with state policymakers and advocate for policies that advance equity and opportunities for women across Maryland.



Photo: Pier Blake, Sharon Bugis, Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Kayla M. Joyce, Judy Carbone, Gloria Dent, Monica Watkins, Chair LaShaune Stitt, Jodi Kelber, Second Vice Chair Christine Lee, Joyce King, and Nichelle Schoultz.



Ariana Kelly with Economic Matters Committee Chair Kris Valderrama.



Commissioners Monica Watkins, LaShaune Stitt, Jodi Kelber, and Joyce King and Policy and Program Assistant Camille Fabiyi with Senator Mary Washington (third from right).



Photo: Sharon Bugis, Judy Carbone, Health Committee Chair Heather Bagnall, Nichelle Schoultz, Pier Blake.



Commissioners Monica Watkins, Joyce King, LaShaune Stitt, Jodi Kelber, and intern Alex Mayen Velazquez with Senator Dawn Gile (third from right).

Honoring Speaker Jones & Commission for Women Statutory Update

House Bill 1300, sponsored by Delegate Terri Hill, modernizes and updates the Commission for Women Statute, and names the African American Heritage Preservation Program in honor of the first woman Maryland Speaker, Adrienne Jones. We were proud to serve as lead advocates for this important legislation.



Groundbreaking Menopause Legislation

The Commission was honored to work with Tisha Edwards, Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk, Senator Dawn Gile, Health Committee Chair Heather Bagnall and a coalition of advocates and women's health practitioners on groundbreaking legislation (HB 1365/SB 892) to improve menopause care in Maryland.



Right: Chair LaShaune Stitt, Certified Nurse Midwife Sarah Kurtz, Director of Legislative Affairs to the Speaker Erin Hopwood, Tisha Edwards, Robyn Elliott, Michelle Siri, and Ariana Kelly.

Community Survey

This project began in the fall as a story collection. Local Commissions for Women and advocacy groups joined us to collect stories about the real life challenges Maryland women face in finding appropriate menopause care. The results showed a need for clinical training, insurance coverage, and workplace support. They also showed a strong desire for de-stigmatization and visibility.



Policy Development

After identifying common themes, including misdiagnosis, uninformed health care providers, difficulty accessing HRT, and being told to “just deal with” their symptoms, the Commission staff researched policy approaches to addressing these problems.

Staff and Commissioners then got to work identifying possible legislative solutions and bill sponsors. Drawing on legislation from California, Rhode Island and other states, the Policy Subcommittee developed a proposal and began outreach to a coalition. The response was overwhelmingly supportive. A team of volunteer advocates with extensive knowledge of Annapolis came together to support the legislation.

Legislation

Advocates partnered with the Speaker’s office and Senator Gile and Delegate Bagnall to draft legislation to develop and incentivize clinical education, and to ensure insurance coverage for menopause evaluation and treatment. The bill also instructs the Commission for Women to submit a report in fall 2027 recommending further policy change to support women’s health and economic security during menopause.



Left: Senator Dawn Gile and Commissioner Michelle Siri testifying in support of menopause legislation. Right: Certified Nurse Midwife Sarah Kurtz, Ariana Kelly, and Senator Dawn Gile testifying.

Public Education:

M Factor 2: Movie-Screening & Community Conversation at Government House

The Commission partnered with the First Lady’s office and Executive Alliance to screen the documentary “The M Factor” with women business leaders and local Commissioners from across the state. The screening took place on May 26th to celebrate the Governor’s signing of the menopause legislation, and kick off the menopause related work the legislation requires.

After a welcome from the First Lady, Ariana Kelly spoke on an expert panel with film producer Denise Pines and menopause expert Dr. Sharon Malone, moderated by Tisha Edwards, about the need for policy change and education regarding the menopause transition.

In addition to making future policy recommendations, our FY 27 plans include supporting local commissions in menopause outreach and education, additional legislation targeting menopause care and discrimination, and webinars addressing the specific experiences of Black, AAPI and Hispanic/Latina women.



Campus Access to Reproductive Health Care Legislation

The Commission for Women partnered with a coalition of reproductive health organizations and student advocates to support SB 532 sponsored by Senator Cheryl Kagan and HB1076 sponsored by Delegate Stephanie Smith. These bills align the existing reporting requirements across 2- and 4-year public higher education institutions in the state, and clarify that all forms of birth control available over-the-counter should be available to students. They will help our campus programs run more smoothly and with better public transparency and reporting.



Commissioners, staff, and legislators, including bill sponsor Senator Cheryl Kagan at the bill signing for the campus birth control access legislation.

Public Education, Outreach and Awards

Women's Rights Organizational Partnerships

As part of our mission, the Commission supported partner organizations in FY2026.

Women Legislators of Maryland Foundation

Opening Reception 2026:

Celebrating the 54th Anniversary of the 1st Women's Caucus in the Nation

The Commission was honored to sponsor the 54th anniversary event for the nation's first Women's Caucus, recognizing meaningful milestones while reaffirming the important work that remains ahead. Commissioner Gabriela Lemus attended the event in support of the continued work to advance equity, strengthen community partnerships, and expand opportunities across Maryland.



Women Legislators of Maryland Foundation Treasurer Veronica Cool (left) and Commissioner Gabriela Lemus (right) with event attendees.

Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW)

2025 Fall Conference

The Maryland Commission for Women continued our strong partnership with MLAW, the non-partisan, statewide coalition of groups and individuals that advocates for laws and policies to protect the well-being of women and families in Maryland. Founded in 1994 by the Commission for Women, MLAW is now an independent nonprofit organization. The Commission was proud to be a leading sponsor of MLAW's fall conference, convening organizations, advocates and legislators from across the state.

Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA)

2026 Legislative Reception

The Commission was proud to sponsor this annual gathering focused on Maryland's response to sexual violence, MCASA's ongoing efforts to end sexual violence statewide, and the critical work of rape crisis centers across Maryland. This year's Visionary Awardees included Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown, State Senator Dawn Gile (District 33), and Melissa Hoppmeyer, Director of Operations and Training at the U.S. Army Office of Special Trial Counsel.



Commissioner Joyce King and Camille Fabiyi.

Maryland NOW

Support ERA - The Golden Flyer II

The Maryland Commission for Women participated in an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) advocacy event in Annapolis, bringing together organizations and advocates to encourage congressional recognition of the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The event celebrated the successful passage of Maryland's 2024 joint resolution urging Congress to affirm the ERA and highlighted the continued importance of advancing constitutional equality.

Reproductive Justice Maryland

Steeped in Justice 2nd Annual High Tea

Chair LaShaune Stitt, Management Associate Genesis Franco, and Commissioner Judy Carbone from the Maryland Commission for Women attended Reproductive Justice Maryland's Third Anniversary Afternoon Tea. Delegate Lesley Lopez was honored for her continued advocacy and unwavering commitment to reproductive justice.



Left: Executive Director Jakeya Johnson presents an award to Delegate Leslie Lopez. **Right:** LaShaune Stitt, Genesis Franco, and Judy Carbone.

Women's Law Center of Maryland

2026 Annual Awards Ceremony & Celebration

The Commission was proud to sponsor the Women's Law Center of Maryland Annual Celebration & Awards Ceremony, where Executive Director Ariana Kelly received the Dorothy Beatty Memorial Award. The ceremony also honored Zenita Wickham Hurley, Esq., Deputy Attorney General in the Maryland Office of the Attorney General; the Honorable Christopher Panos; the Honorable Stacy A. Mayer; the Nicholas H. and Margaret H. Carlozzi Foundation; and the Steve and Sheila Sachs Pursuit of Justice Fund.



L-R: Ariana Kelly receives award from J. Nicole Windsor and Katie Curran O'Malley.

The evening highlighted the powerful impact created when nonprofit leaders, legal professionals, advocates, and elected officials come together to advance justice and opportunity for women across Maryland.

Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV)

The Commission is a proud sponsor of MNADV, Maryland's State Domestic Violence coalition, providing leadership in education, training and advocacy to eliminate intimate partner violence. This coalition was founded as a result of a statewide convening hosted by the Commission for Women back in 1980. We are honored to continue our partnership and support their important work today.



Executive Director Ariana Kelly joined as a featured speaker as Maryland Latinos Unidos hosted a People's Policy Series conversation on the Latina wage gap and its impact on families and economic mobility across Maryland. The discussion explored key drivers of the wage gap, including barriers to advancement, occupational segregation, caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to professional networks, along with policy solutions to support Latina economic mobility.

Maryland Bankers Association: Women & Allies Conference

Commissioner Patricia Lambert spoke on the Real Talk: Women's Health & Well-Being in the Workplace panel at the Maryland Bankers Association Women and Allies Conference. Moderated by Tisha Edwards, President & CEO of the Maryland Bankers Association, the discussion also featured Tiffany Boiman, a national policy expert on women's issues and member of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, and Dr. Christina Enzmann, a board-certified gynecologist specializing in menopause and functional medicine. The discussion centered around strategies to address the health and wellness needs of women and how to have a workplace where women can thrive.



L-R: Tisha Edwards, Tiffany Boiman, First Vice Chair Patricia Lambert, and Dr. Christina Enzmann.

United Way's: Women United - Conversation Starter on the Gender Pay Gap

Women United recently hosted a Conversation Starter focused on the persistent issue of gender-based wage disparities, which affect all women and disproportionately impact the women and families served by United Way of Central Maryland across our region. Our Executive Director, Ariana Kelly, joined the panel alongside Melissa A. Groves, Chairperson and Associate Professor of Economics at Towson University, and Shari Bailey, Founder & CEO of Laila's Gift.



Kendra Parlock, Ariana Kelly, Dr. Melissa Groves, and Shari Bailey speak on a panel.



Adriane Keepler, Ariana Kelly, Dr. Melissa Groves, Kendra Parlock, and Shari Bailey.

Collaboration with Local Commissions

2025 Maryland State and Local Commissions for Women Convening

Following the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) fall conference, the Maryland Commission for Women held the 2025 Local Commissions Convening. The Commission for Women Foundation sponsored each local Chair's attendance at MLAW.

The event brought together county and local women's commissions, community leaders, and advocates from across Maryland to exchange ideas, strengthen partnerships, and celebrate progress toward gender equity. The program featured remarks from Executive Director Ariana Kelly and Commission Chair Dr. LaShaune Stitt, recognition of women's legislative champions, and updates on the Hall of Fame and Over-the-Counter (OTC) Contraception projects.

Attendees also engaged in interactive sessions exploring the impact of recent federal policy changes on Maryland women and strategies for building stronger networks of support statewide.



L-R, Front to Back: Chair LaShaune Stitt, Jody Kelber, Tatiana Levone, Mae Beale, Kionne Abdul-Malik, and Second Vice Chair Christine Lee; Tekisha Everette, Carolyn Keaton Culp, Megan Outten, Brittany Young, Tawanda Bailey, Kaprece James, Sheena Foster, Sharon Blugis, and Judy Carbone.



Chair LaShaune Stitt, Second Vice Chair Christine Lee, and Local Commissions Chair Tekisha Everette address the gathering.

October 29 – Harford County Commission for Women Personal Safety for Women

On October 29th, the Harford County Commission for Women hosted an event titled “Personal Safety for Women.” This presentation offered practical strategies to help women stay safe in their daily lives. Teresa Walter, former Havre de Grace Police Chief, shared expert insights along with simple, effective tactics to help women recognize risks, avoid dangerous situations, and reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of violence. Representing the Maryland Commission for Women, Genesis Franco, Management Associate, and Camille Fabiyi attended the event.



L-R: Harford County Commissioner Liliana Norkaitis, Harford County Commission Chair Allison McCord, Genesis Franco, and Camille Fabiyi

Baltimore City Commission’s “State of the Womb” Event



Baltimore City Commission Chair Kionne Abdul-Malik (center) with event attendees.

On January 23, Chair LaShuane Stitt participated in the Baltimore City Commission for Women’s “State of the Womb” event, which brought together community members, advocates, and leaders to discuss women’s health, reproductive well-being, and issues affecting women and families. The event provided an opportunity for meaningful dialogue, community engagement, and collaboration to raise awareness of women’s health needs and promote improved outcomes for women across Maryland.

Montgomery County Women’s Legislative Briefing

Visionary Women: Shaping Tomorrow Together

The Maryland Commission for Women was proud to sponsor the annual Women’s Legislative Briefing (WLB), coordinated by the Montgomery County Commission for Women. The event brings together advocates, policymakers, and emerging leaders to discuss key issues affecting women and girls, including legislation expected to be introduced during the upcoming sessions of the Maryland General Assembly and the U.S. Congress. The briefing provides an opportunity for community members to engage directly with legislators, ask questions, and advocate for policies that impact their communities. Commission staff attended the event and hosted an informational table to promote the Commission’s programs, resources, and ongoing work on behalf of Maryland women and girls.



Montgomery County Commission for Women Chair Sheena Foster addresses attendees.

April 28 - Frederick County Government Grant Program Awards Announcement Event

County Executive Jessica Fitzwater announced the FY27 Community Partnership Grant Program awards, recognizing the important role of local nonprofit organizations in strengthening the community. Through this competitive grant program, 42 nonprofit organizations received a combined \$1.2 million in funding to support initiatives that improve the quality of life for Frederick County residents. Funding priorities focused on four key community needs: addressing homelessness and housing solutions, improving quality of life, advancing public health, and supporting the arts.



Sharon Blugis and Frederick County Commission Chair Tawanda Bailey.

May 7 - County Commission Chairs Meeting

The Maryland Commission for Women convened its May meeting with representatives from local Commissions for Women across the state sharing updates on current initiatives, community outreach efforts, and upcoming programs. County and local commissions highlighted work focused on gathering community input, increasing awareness of available resources, supporting women's leadership, addressing issues impacting women and families, and recognizing the achievements of women and girls.



The meeting featured presentations from the Montgomery County Commission for Women on efforts to prevent and address human trafficking, including community education, victim-centered services, legislative advocacy, and public awareness initiatives. The Wicomico County Commission for Women also presented its work advocating for local childcare solutions through a proposed childcare facilities tax credit initiative aimed at improving access to affordable childcare.

Commissioners discussed local women's recognition programs, including awards and leadership initiatives that celebrate women's achievements and encourage the next generation of leaders. These conversations provided an opportunity to share best practices and strengthen collaboration among Commissions for Women throughout Maryland.

May 21 - Baltimore County Commission Awards

The Baltimore County Commission for Women proudly recognizes exceptional women whose leadership, service, and dedication have made a lasting impact on Baltimore County. These honorees serve as inspiring role models through their meaningful contributions to our communities, businesses, and the lives of those around them. This year's award recipients exemplify excellence, breaking barriers and going above and beyond in their respective fields and in service to others. 2026 Award Recipients Woman of the Year: Susan Bollinger; Woman Making a Difference: Sarah Ernst; Entrepreneur of the Year: Rebecca Vest Young; Young Women of the Year: Cayden Wilson and Grace Berquist.



LaShaune Stitt, Chair of the Commission for Women, and Sheena Foster, Chair of the Montgomery County Commission for Women.



60 Years of Progress Project

“Commission Through The Years” Online Archives

In recognition of the Maryland Commission for Women’s 60th anniversary, the Commission expanded its digital historical archive through the “The Commission Through the Years” initiative.

This online collection preserves reports, brochures, newsletters, legislative agendas, and other publications spanning six decades of advocacy, documenting the Commission’s leadership in advancing women’s rights, promoting equity, and informing public policy in Maryland.

By making these historical resources publicly accessible, the Commission honors its legacy while providing valuable context for future leaders, researchers, and advocates committed to improving the lives of Maryland women and girls. We thank the Maryland State Archives for their partnership in this work.

Celebrating 60 Years of Progress Foundation Event

The Maryland Commission for Women Foundation raised \$25,000 to support our internship program at a special 60th Anniversary Brunch and Silent Auction in honor of six decades of advocacy, leadership, and progress for Maryland’s women and girls. The celebration was graciously hosted by Commissioner and Foundation President Sarah Klein at her home, where supporters, community leaders, and friends gathered to reflect on this historic milestone. Current and former Commissioners were joined by elected officials and women’s rights advocates from across the state to celebrate.



Celebrating 60 Years of Progress Foundation Event



L-R: Emily Charlap, Delegate Lesley Lopez, and Fran Rothstein.



L-R: Linda Berg and Commission for Women Foundation President Sarah Klein.



L-R: Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, Montgomery County Commissioner Susan Horst, Montgomery County Council member Laurie-Anne Sayles, and Montgomery County NOW President Jeanette Feldner.



L-R: Delegate Karen Toles, Delegate Edith Patterson, Izzy Klein, and Sheena Foster.



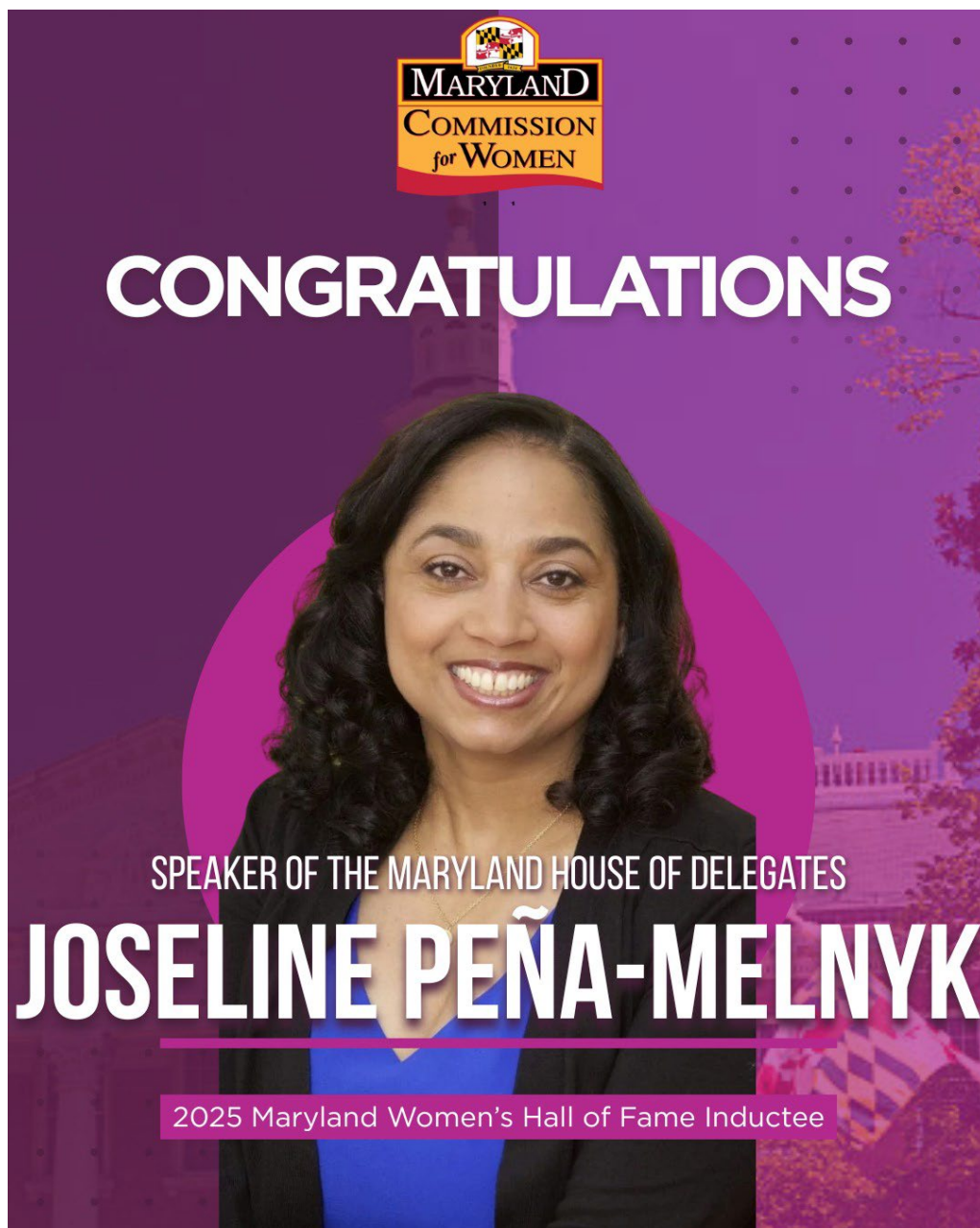
L-R: Former Commissioner Rosalyn Levy Jonas, Ariana Kelly, Chair LaShaune Stitt, Secretary of State Susan Lee, Second Vice Chair Christine Lee, Fatima Barry, Tazeen Ahmad.

Awards & Recognition

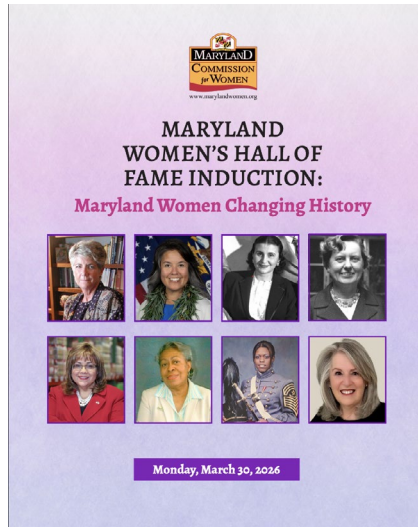
Maryland Women Changing History

Recognizing The Nation's First Afro-Latina Speaker

Maryland's New Speaker of the House Joseline Peña-Melnyk



Maryland Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony



In March 2026, the Maryland Commission for Women in partnership with Governor Wes Moore and the Maryland State Archives proudly inducted eight extraordinary women into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame, recognizing their lasting contributions to business, science, health, advocacy, education, and civic leadership.

Established in 1985, the Hall of Fame honors Maryland women whose achievements have shaped the state's history and inspired future generations. The annual induction ceremony, held during Women's History Month at Government House, highlights the remarkable accomplishments of women whose leadership has strengthened communities across Maryland and beyond, while reaffirming the Commission's commitment to preserving and celebrating women's history and advancing opportunities for future leaders.

2026 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame Inductees



Dr. Sharon Camp (1943-2025), a pioneering public policy leader whose work transformed reproductive health care in the United States and around the world. Widely recognized as the “mother of Plan B,” Dr. Camp founded the Women's Capital Corporation after major pharmaceutical companies declined to develop emergency contraception. Through her leadership, Plan B became available to millions of women in the United States and Canada, fundamentally expanding access to reproductive health care.



Wendy Chun-Hoon is president and executive director of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), where she leads national efforts to advance economic security, workplace equity, and care policies for women and families. Throughout her career, she has championed policies that elevate the voices of women, LGBTQ+ people, and historically marginalized communities through coalition-building, research, and advocacy. From 2021 to 2024, Ms. Chun-Hoon served as Administrator of the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau after being appointed by President Joe Biden. She began her career as Chief of Staff at the Maryland Department of Human Services.



Annunciata “Nancy” Lombardi D'Alesandro was one of Baltimore's longest-serving first ladies and the only woman in the city's history to be both the wife and mother of Baltimore mayors. A dedicated public servant and political leader, she expanded women's engagement in politics and devoted her life to serving the city's most vulnerable residents. D'Alesandro worked tirelessly over decades to help the immigrant community and low-income Baltimoreans.



Dr. Margaret Oakley Dayhoff (1925-1983), a pioneering mathematician and biochemist whose groundbreaking work established the field of bioinformatics. Often referred to as the “mother and father of bioinformatics,” she transformed biological research by applying computer science and mathematics to the analysis of DNA, RNA, and protein sequences. Working at a time when few women pursued careers in science, Dr. Dayhoff overcame significant barriers to become one of the foremost innovators in computational biology. In 1965, she published the *Atlas of Protein Sequence and Structure*, the first comprehensive collection of known protein sequence.



Elda M. Devarie is an entrepreneur, community leader, and advocate whose vision transformed a small home-based business into one of the Mid-Atlantic region’s leading international food distributors. As founder of EMD Sales, Inc., she built a successful company that connects grocery stores, restaurants, and wholesalers with diverse global food products while creating opportunities for employees and communities. Born in Puerto Rico, Ms. Devarie brought her entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to hard work to Maryland, where she founded EMD Sales in 1989.



Senator Delores G. Kelley is a trailblazing educator, legislator, and advocate whose nearly three decades of public service transformed health care policy, women’s rights, and equity in Maryland. Widely recognized as a history-maker and mentor, she broke racial and gender barriers while championing legislation that improved the lives of women and families across the state. Before entering elected office, Senator Kelley spent more than 30 years at Coppin State University, serving as both faculty member and dean. She began her legislative career in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1991 before becoming the first African American elected to represent Baltimore County in the Maryland State Senate, where she served from 1995 to 2023.



Emily Jazmin Tatum Perez (1983–2006) was a trailblazing U.S. Army officer whose extraordinary leadership, commitment to public service, and ultimate sacrifice continue to inspire future generations. Raised in Maryland, Emily excelled academically and athletically before entering the United States Military Academy at West Point, where she made history as the first African American and first Latina woman to serve as Cadet Command Sergeant Major and the highest-ranking woman of color cadet in the Academy’s history at the time.



Susan Wolf Turnbull has devoted more than five decades to public service through political leadership, grassroots organizing, philanthropy, and advocacy. A nationally recognized Democratic leader, she has played a pivotal role in expanding opportunities for women in politics and strengthening grassroots political engagement in Maryland and across the country. After beginning her career as a volunteer on local and statewide campaigns, Ms. Turnbull was elected to the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee and later served as a Democratic National Committeewoman for Maryland from 1992 to 2011.



L-R, Front to Back: Pier Blake, US House of Representatives Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, First Lady Dawn Moore, Chair LaShaune Stitt, Ariana Kelly, Joyce King, Michelle Siri, Gabriela Lemus, First Vice Chair Pat Lambert, Ruth Martin, Alice Cain, Jody Kelber, Linda Han, Amanda Rodriguez, Maggi Gaines, and Second Vice Chair Christine Lee.



Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi with Maeve Sanford-Kelly, the history student who nominated Pelosi's mother, Nancy D'Alesandro, for induction into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.



Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller, Wendy Chun-Hoon, Susan Turnbull, and Senate President Bill Ferguson.



Senator Sara Love, Executive Director Ariana Kelly, Secretary of State Susan Lee, and inductee Susan Turnbull.



Daniel and Vicki Perez, parents of posthumous inductee Lieutenant Emily JT Perez, with Commissioner Gloria Dent.



Robyn Elliott and Hall of Fame inductee Senator Delores Kelley.



Paul and Nancy Pelosi, Senator Delores Kelley, and Elda Devarie.

Looking Forward

In the year ahead the Maryland Commission for Women will continue building on its commitment to advancing opportunities, equity, and advocacy for women throughout the state.

The Commission will advance policy and legislative efforts on issues affecting women and families, expand partnerships with local Commissions for Women, state leaders, and community organizations, and increase public awareness through education, outreach, and engagement initiatives. The Commission will continue supporting efforts related to women's health, economic security, leadership opportunities, and the recognition and preservation of women's history.



Maryland Commission for Women

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