

Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour
Allegany County
Allegany College of Maryland – Cumberland Campus
Continuing Education Building – Room 8
August 9, 2017 ♦ 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

The Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour traveled into the Appalachian Mountains on a summer evening to beautiful Allegany County. There, thirty-six women gathered to discuss their concerns as women in this community in Maryland's western panhandle. The public forum was organized as a partnership between the Commissions for Women of Allegany County and the state of Maryland.

The attendees at the forum included individuals, representatives of women's and community advocacy organizations and service providers. They passionately identified a wide range of issues and challenges for the women of Allegany County, selected five they thought were most important, and discussed possible remedies. Like the women who participated in the Listening Tour to the west in Garrett County, there was a deep sense of isolation the participants feel from the rest of the state, due in part to the physical distance from Maryland's centers of government and industry, and to technological issues including very slow or no connectivity with the Internet, and the lack of access to technology in general for the rural poor in the community. They also discussed influences associated with the traditional "Appalachian culture," specifically its impact on the roles and expectations of women and girls. To put the concerns raised at this forum in context, Suburbanstats.org sets the population of Allegany County at just over 75,000 and 89% white, compared to about 58% white for the state as a whole. The forum participants expressed deep gratitude that the state Commission for Women had come across the mountains to their county to hear what they had to say. And they had much to say.

The participants listed a total of 24 challenges facing the women of Allegany County. Each participant was given five "votes" to place beside the issues she considered most important. From that process, five were selected as the top priorities.

The group then identified actions that could be taken to address each of the "top five" issues:

1. The impact of the "Appalachian culture" specifically on women and girls. The Appalachian culture was defined, with widespread agreement among the participants, as including the internalization of the former "colonization" of the region— where resources and political power are controlled by people and corporations external to the county – geological resource extracting companies, etc., male dominance and patriarchy, rural poverty, isolation, strong traditions, lack of emphasis on education in general and especially for girls, avoidance of change, reliance on family, etc.

- a. Establish mentoring programs for girls and young women
 - b. Fund programs that focus on the prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault, including teaching boys not to victimize girls and women
 - c. Develop high-speed Internet access for the entire county
 - d. Improve and expand public transportation in the county
 - e. Elect more women to public office
 - f. Provide leadership training in the public schools for girls
 - g. Require gender equity training for faculty, law enforcement, the judiciary, and all public officials
2. Too few women in public office
 - a. Establish networks that support women candidates and encourage women's political participation at all levels
 - b. Provide information about how to get appointed to county and state boards, committees and commissions
 - c. Require gender respect and equality training for all public officials
 - d. Institute a "watch" program for public meetings, hearings and other events to hold public officials accountable for their language and behavior. ("Cupcake is not an acceptable term to use to refer to a female member of the board.")
3. Too few jobs that pay a living wage
 - a. Increase the minimum wage
 - b. Recruit industries that offer woman-friendly jobs
 - c. Establish new/small business incubators
 - d. Utilize the anchor institutions (university, college, hospital) to increase the number of jobs with benefits and a living wage
 - e. Use technology to teach to a "mastery level" for each course in each grade, not just a "passing level", and ensure that girls are included
 - f. Offer free tuition at Allegany County College
4. Isolation from the rest of the state, ignored by state legislature, perception of Allegany county residents as "backwards."
 - a. Promote awareness of Allegany County throughout Maryland
 - b. Establish regular visits here with open forums with heads of state agencies and state-wide elected officials: "Spend some time here."
 - c. Provide funding that would permit and encourage participation by county residents for all state boards, committees and commissions (travel and lodging expenses, etc., and permit digital participation by board members.
5. Schools steer girls into stereotypical roles and away from STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) education and careers
 - a. Encourage parents to be equal partners in their child's education, including middle and high school
 - b. Establish STEAM camps and clubs for girls, with scholarships for girls from low-income families
 - c. Conduct a public education campaign about educational equity requirements
 - d. Establish women mentoring women and girls programs
 - e. Institute leadership programs for girls.

The chart below lists all the issues identified during the course of the public forum and shows the number of votes each one received from those in attendance as they considered the priority level of each issue in comparison to the others.

Number of Votes	Issue
25	The impact of the “Appalachian culture” specifically on women and girls.
23	Too few women in public office
21	Too few jobs that pay a living wage
21	Isolation from the rest of the state, ignored by state legislature, perception of Allegany county residents as “backwards.”
12	Schools steer girls into stereotypical roles and away from STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) education and careers
10	Sexual violence against women and girls
9	Lack of public transportation
7	Multigenerational poverty
6	Lack of opportunities for young women
5	Need for reproductive health and family planning education
4	Domestic Violence
3	Single mothers and poverty
3	Ineffective male elected representatives who fail to address women’s concerns
2	Need to train young girls about internet and social media safety
2	Lack of affordable housing
1	Child Abuse
1	Political divisiveness
0	Human Trafficking
0	Women burdened with dependent care
0	Lack of guidance and mentoring for young women after high school
0	Shortage of primary health care providers
0	Too few successful female role models
0	Opioid epidemic
0	Lack of affordable child care
155	Total Votes – 24 Issues

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Allegheny County: Voices of Maryland Women

Photo Album







