



Maine Permanent Commission on **THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (MePCSW)

Meeting Minutes

June 8th, 2026

9:00 – 2:30 P.M.

MePCSW Members in Attendance: Samantha Lott Hale, Sue Mackey Andrews, Maulian Bryant (virtual), Jennifer Wilkey, Rebecca Austin, Darylen Cote (virtual), Eva White, Jill Barkley Roy, Kate Easter, Julie Mallett (virtual), Eisha Khan, Dania Bowie

MePCSW Members Absent: Chris Hastedt, Anne Gass, Fatuma Hussein, Khadija El Barkaoui

Staff and Guests: Christine Rudalevige (MePCSW Data Fellow), Sumaya Abdulle (Dept. of Secretary of State Intern), Elinor Higgins (MePCSW ED)

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Facilitator: Samantha Lott Hale, MePCSW Chair

Arrival and Welcome

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Completed an ice breaker activity where Commissioners shared the many hats they wear (and their favorite literal hats!)

Old Business and Public Comment

1. Reviewed April meeting minutes
 - a. Motion to approve: Eisha
 - b. Second: Kate
 - c. Vote: Unanimous vote to approve
2. Reviewed MePCSW Member Handbook
 - a. Highlighted new additions since the last draft including policies on remote participation, quorum, and food expenses.
 - b. Motion to approve: Sue
 - c. Second: Dania
 - d. Vote: Unanimous vote to approve
3. Any members of the public may introduce themselves and speak for 3 minutes
 - a. No members of the public present

Strategic Plan Review

1. Reviewed mission statement and MePCSW vision statements from 2025 strategic planning process.

2. Discussed highlights and successes to celebrate from the past year. These included:
 - a. Increased outreach, presenting at 12 events in 2025 and 2026, with over 100 registrants for the 2026 webinar
 - b. Publication of reports, issue briefs, and memos, with an upcoming task of doing a study for the legislature about gender segregation in the Maine workforce
 - c. Operational improvements including engagement through committee structures and a MePCSW budget allocation
3. Discussed challenges and opportunities including:
 - a. Managing committee vacancies and reappointments – with an effort to focus on this more in the next six months ahead of elections and government leadership transitions.
 - b. Efficient scheduling of MePCSW committee meetings – agreed to move to a monthly schedule where committees meet concurrently every other month
 - c. Balancing legislative advocacy work with capacity constraints. The group discussed opportunities to better utilize individual members for testimony and outreach and the potential for policy positions that allow for flexibility in decision making about specific bills.
 - i. Identified challenges meeting goal of 10 legislator meetings per year and discussed potentially implementing an advocacy day at the State House as a more focused approach to increase engagement with legislators.
 - ii. Discussed preparation strategies for upcoming legislative session, including the creation of materials that highlight the work of the MePCSW while also showcasing impact and reach.

Work Plan Overview

1. Reviewed upcoming projects including:
 - a. 2026 biennial MePCSW report on the status of women and girls
 - b. Report on gender segregation in the workforce, due to the legislature at the end of 2027
 - c. Development of a data dashboard aggregating information about women and girls in Maine
 - d. Opportunities to build out communication strategies, including interested parties email list and social media strategies.
2. Mentioned a recurring focus on maternal health infrastructure coming up across multiple projects and discussions.
3. Vote to approve the 2026/27 work plan
 - a. Motion to approve: Jill
 - b. Second: Dania
 - c. Vote: Unanimous vote to approve

Budget Overview

1. Overview of current budget structure and changes to a unique MePCSW budget line in the next fiscal year. Explanation of the personal services and all other budget lines, as well as a clarification of the role of MePCSW in the budget process.

2. Upcoming expenditures are planned for contractors to build data dashboard and support research on upcoming reports. Also anticipating graphic design and printing expenses for the upcoming 2026 report and recurring costs for Elinor's position, meeting logistics, and space rentals.
3. Vote to approve the 2026/27 (FY27) budget
 - a. Motion to approve: Rebecca
 - b. Second: Dania
 - c. Vote: Unanimous vote to approve

Reviewing Core Operating Principles for MePCSW

1. Reviewed and discussed operating principles for the MePCSW, exploring wording and how to utilize the principles in both practical and symbolic ways.
 - a. Discussed strengthening inclusivity language in the operating principles, with a suggestion to use the more comprehensive inclusivity language from the National Association of Commissions on Women materials. Debate about whether it is preferable to have a comprehensive list or a more general statement – agreed to combine these approaches and revisit in the next MePCSW meeting.

Update on the 2026 Report and Data Dashboard

1. Overview of the 2026 Report:
 - a. Report will center on five pillars: education and opportunity, work and economic security, freedom from violence, health and well-being, and leadership, engagement, and community.
 - b. In acknowledgement of the semiquincentennial of the U.S., plan to include a timeline of women's rights in Maine and feature personal stories from commissioners about inspiring women from Maine history (or their personal history).
 - i. Suggestion to include information and context from before 1820
 - c. Next steps include convening advisory groups around each pillar and incorporating feedback from recent outreach events into the report.
2. Overview of progress toward data dashboard
 - a. Reviewed the goal of the dashboard, which aims to complement the biennial reports with consistent data metrics that provide an overview of key issues impacting women and girls.
 - b. Highlighted Christine's work on building a framework for the dashboard, and the current progress on the education and opportunities pillar.
 - c. Shared some examples of information around the education experience, including around bullying and protective factors in Maine K-12 schools
 - i. Discussed opportunities to highlight data about other education pathways
 - d. Update on the timeline: possibility of slowing down release date or launching a beta version with just one or two pillars alongside the 2026 report.

Framing and Focus Activity – Discussion of Key Issues Facing Women and Girls in 2026

1. The team discussed the possibility of creating a narrative thread of women's experiences for the 2026 report, and acknowledged the difficulty of capturing a set of experiences that feels universal. Suggestion to focus more on shared or common barriers, with a common thread of “the protective factors like education are not working to protect people”
2. Discussed key issues across the five pillars from the report and dashboard. Topics included:
 - a. **Education and opportunity:** school funding formulas, teacher pay, educational segregation and the connection to career paths and opportunity, impacts of ICE raids on kids’ participation at school, sports and equal resourcing for girls sports
 - b. **Work and economic security:** workplace harassment, gender wage gap, housing insecurity, disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, child care, connections to family planning care deserts, rural opportunities, women entering nontraditional workplaces without accompanying culture change
 - c. **Health and wellbeing:** “living longer not better,” reproductive health funding and rulings, medical debt, Medicaid work requirements, private equity in residential care for older adults, obstetric unit closures, access to care generally, mental health services, substance use issues/access to services and harm reduction, reimbursement rates for long-acting birth control, HIV outbreaks, decreases in available gender-affirming care, increasing rates of “planned delivery” at births due to long travel times for OB/GYN care, doula care/funding, access to physicians in rural areas
 - d. **Freedom from violence:** need for culture change, issues around financial abuse, family court systems and having to co-parent with abusers, incorrect assumptions about how violence happens, persistent funding challenges for survivors’ advocates (many of whom are survivors themselves) – “It’s getting harder to do this work”, issues getting young people connected to/aware of resources, ICE presence and raids impacting ability to get food, medical care, access education, elder abuse and the intersection with care worker shortages, incarceration rates for women increasing (generally for nonviolent crimes, often tied to accessing basic needs and taking care of children)
 - e. **Leadership, connection, and community:** disproportionate threats of gendered violence in political spheres (and potential impacts on women’s political ambitions), women of color in c-suite roles and elected roles, existence of community organizations, time and opportunity to participate in community events and organizations, transportation issues, ageism on both ends of the age spectrum, connections to economic security They decided to modify their planned small-group activity to a collective brainstorming session where participants would identify and rank the top three challenges in each category, focusing on current emerging issues rather than historical problems. The discussion covered specific concerns including, workplace harassment, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women.
3. Noted that many issues intersect across categories and that employment appears to be a common denominator affecting housing, economic security, healthcare, childcare access, and more.
4. Plan to continue refining these topics through future meetings and listening sessions to potentially identify focus areas for advocacy work.

Closing

1. Closing remarks and distribution of meeting evaluations, with plan to create an online version of the evaluation