



Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (MePCSW)

Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2025

9:00 – 11:00 A.M.

MePCSW Commission Members in Attendance: Anne Gass, Keita Whitten Foster, Kate Easter, Kate Elmes, Chris Hastedt, Kate Elmes, Jill Barkley Roy, Rebecca Austin, Darylen Cote, Samantha Lott Hale, Fatuma Hussein, Eisha Khan, Jennifer Wilkey, Sue Mackey Andrews, Eva White

MePCSW Commission Members Absent: Dania Bowie, Karen Hadley Keim, Maulian Bryant, Julie Mallett

Staff and Guests:

- Elinor Higgins, MePCSW Executive Director
- Dr. Lelia De Andrade, Deputy Secretary of State for Community Relations (Guest facilitator for strategic planning conversation)

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Facilitators:

Anne Gass, MePCSW Chair

Dr. Lelia De Andrade, Deputy Secretary of State for Community Relations (Guest facilitator for strategic planning conversation)

Old Business and Public Comment

1. Approve February meeting minutes
 - a. Motion to approve: Kate Elmes
 - b. Second:
 - c. Vote: Unanimous approval
2. Any members of the public may introduce themselves and speak for 3 minutes
 - a. No members of the public in attendance

Updates from MePCSW Chair and Executive Director

1. Brief legislative update
 - a. LD 135 - modified to mileage for two meetings per year and got a unanimous report of ought to pass. Not everything we wanted, but it is a good start in a tough budget year
 - b. LD 522 - divided report in committee on party lines, but it has advanced.
2. [Updated website](#) and new logo
3. TOMORROW – Webinar on the gender wage gap

4. Planning for day-long June meeting
 - a. Planning to host this meeting in Bangor on June 27th
5. Updates on the Chair and Vice Chair roles
 - a. Current MePCSW Chair Anne Gass plans to step down in June. Current MePCSW Vice Chair Samantha Lott Hale will start the appointment process for Chair with Gov. Mills and a new Vice Chair will be elected by this body in June.

New Business – Strategic Planning Discussion

1. Level Set – Overview of Current Activities (Elinor):
 - a. Continuing to promote the findings of 2024 report and to look for opportunities to distribute the report to lawmakers and have conversations about the content
 - b. Statewide data governance workgroup has started up again this year and recently released annual report to the legislature
 - c. Gov. EO Women in construction work - Continuing to play a convening and connecting role, largely focused on promoting safety from gender-based violence and sexual harassment in construction workplaces. That cross agency workgroup has produced some tools and resources and a training is under development. The child care group has tapered off due to shifting priorities from key partners and federal funding concerns
 - d. Operational work continues, including the development of a policy manual/member handbook
2. Review Survey Results and Process (Lelia)
 - a. Brief timeline to create a draft – aiming to wrap up the strategic plan by June 2025 (reminder that the strategic plan is separate from annual work plans)
 - b. Reviewed the process:
 - i. First survey (January), discussion (February meeting), first draft of goals (March), second survey (March), discussion (April meeting)
 - ii. **Next step:** go on to the next level of the draft. Refine the goals, tighten up the activities.
 - c. Overview of report findings:
 - i. Interest from Commission members in building relationships
 - ii. Interest in working to ensure Commission members are contributing, participating, and giving feedback
 - iii. Want to strike the balance between operational work and external work
 - iv. Want to take care not to overload staff/members and take on too much
 - v. Want to give MePCSW clear goals, ways to measure progress
 - vi. Want to have a framework for tracking and assessing success
3. Facilitated Discussion about Commission Priorities and Activities (Lelia)
 - a. Ongoing process of defining the role of the Commission – emphasizing role of the MePCSW in data and reporting, teasing out the Commission’s role in advocacy, and how to approach project-based work
 - b. Highlighted top priorities from survey results, relationship building, hearing from Maine women, developing decision making processes, creating data tools, etc.

- c. Three big goals based on first draft of the strategic plan (refining in from the five goals in that draft). Goals below with discussion:
- i. **Goal 1: Increase knowledge on the status and life outcomes of women in Maine**
 1. Emphasized that the process of doing research is the process of expressing values and positions. The Commission has a position and is creating knowledge to help deepen understanding about what issues are most relevant and impacting Maine women
 2. Emphasized need to be explicit about how we choose and select our focus – thinking about how to address bias.
 3. Work on a critical assessment about the kind of data the Commission collects and uses – whose perspective are being incorporated and whose left out?
 4. Question about how to structure this for a 3-5 year period, compared with a goal that's evergreen. Need to come up with specific goals, qualitative and quantitative data, metrics that we can look at across the goals to ensure success
 5. Suggested the creation of an equity body to consistently evaluate MePCSW work and ensure that equity is a throughline
 6. Question about how to address bias so that no matter the makeup of the group MePCSW is established as a trusted source of information so that we get the buy in of all sides. What guardrails do we need to have to build internal and external trust?
 - a. Make sure to focus on the "why" – why does the Commission want to build trust? To what end?
 7. Question about how to acknowledge that we are still figuring out the Commission's ultimate goal – how to do that without duplication while being realistic about our infrastructure (especially re: data)
 8. Suggestion to ensure that everything MePCSW does is tied back to a goal – specific outcomes and targets
 9. Acknowledge that enhanced credibility and reliability also enhances power to influence policy solutions. The Commission is here to influence policy making that addresses the needs of women and girls
 - ii. **Goal 2: Serve as a trusted advisor and resource about the status of women in Maine to policy makers**
 1. Meeting with key policy makers – both lawmakers but also advocates and lobbyists who influence the development of policy
 2. Supporting the development and passage of legislation – discussed concerns of capacity and care not to duplicate with partners.
 3. Want to ensure that the role of the Commission is to provide offer guidance to the legislature

4. Framing this issue as part of what we are trying to achieve. Legislative activity needs to be specific, tied to MePCSW goals, discerning and strategic.
5. Need to make a plan about who specifically we need to reach out to, and why. Not random, but strategic.

iii. **Goal 3: Increase the impact, sustainability, and efficiency of the Commission's operations**

1. Articulate the values and goals of the commission
2. Create operating structures to manage resources
3. Develop methods of planning, tracking, and evaluating activities

d. Additional discussion of next steps and considerations

- i. Lelia shared list of proposed activities, will share a policy decision making tool
- ii. Thinking concretely about the equity lens – how are we structuring our work and monitoring internal and external processes?
- iii. Governance Committee has an opportunity to think about membership and engagement
- iv. Subcommittee ideas: Equity, research and reporting
- v. Discussed listening sessions and how to structure them to meet goals, maximize accessibility and equity, focus on what information MePCSW would hope to get from these activities. Consideration of alternate strategies (focus groups, connecting with partner organizations, other)
- vi. Question about how to tie goals and research to legislation put forth by the Governor – not something we have done, and may need to be careful about distinction between aligning with the Governor vs being directive
- vii. Suggestion about how to establish annual priorities and goals in alignment with Governor's priorities, legislative priorities, and the priorities of the Commission
- viii. Suggestion to establish a set of questions that all Commission members use in meetings with legislators to establish consistency and set a precedent for how to engage
- ix. Idea of looking at legislative priorities from the first year legislative terms and targeting based on specific priorities and interests
- x. Discussion about subcommittee structure vs. ad hoc support

4. Next Steps:

- a. Elinor will produce next draft and circulate it for review – discuss and finalize during the June 2025 meeting