



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

June 27, 2025

8:45 A.M. - 4 P.M.

Wabanaki Youth and Cultural Center, Bangor, Maine

Meeting Minutes

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

MePCSW Commission Members Absent: Rebecca Austin, Maulian Bryant

Speakers, Guests, and Staff:

- Clarissa Sabattis, Maliseet Chief
- Lisa Sockabasin, co-CEO, Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness
- Shenna Bellows, Maine Secretary of State
- Ariel Ricci, Executive Director, Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations
- Elinor Higgins, MePCSW Executive Director

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Facilitators:

Samantha Lott Hale, MePCSW Chair

Opening and Introduction to Wabanaki Youth and Cultural Center

1. Wabanaki Opening – Chief Sabattis provided an opening song
2. Lisa Sockabasin, Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness co-CEO, provided an overview of programming and initiatives, including plans for the meeting space. Encouraged the Commissioners to lead with love.

Welcome from Secretary of State Shenna Bellows

1. Secretary Bellows welcomed the Commission and highlighted accomplishments from the past year
2. Recognized the service of Anne Gass as Chair of the MePCSW
 - a. Dania read brief remarks of gratitude for Anne
3. Welcomed Sam Lott Hale as the newly appointed Chair of MePCSW

Finalizing the Strategic Plan

1. Elinor provided an overview of the strategic planning process and walked through the proposed goals:
 - a. Goal 1: Increase knowledge of the status and life outcomes of women in Maine
 - b. Goal 2: Serve as a trusted advisor and resource about the status of women in Maine to policy makers
 - c. Goal 3: Increase the impact, sustainability and efficiency of the commission's operations
2. Discussion and suggested edits to proposed Mission Statement:
 - a. Clarify that the MePCSW is nonpartisan and independent, but not neutral on issues relating to women and girls
 - b. Proposed edits to the statement to strengthen the language, make it more concise, and more specific
3. Overview of proposed Metrics/Progress Tracking for the strategic goals
 - a. Key indicators proposed to track progress, including specific deadlines and specific numbers of reports, meetings, and focus areas
 - b. Suggestion:
4. Discussion of strategic plan content, goals, and action plans
 - a. Elinor noted: A MePCSW calendar in the works to define a two-year cycle of work
 - b. Suggestion to edit the language of Goals 1 and 2 to reference the "full spectrum of women and girls"
 - c. Discussed the role of the MePCSW as a consistent guide for policymakers, a thought leader, offering policymakers the Commission's priorities and driving the MePCSW agenda rather than being pulled in too many directions
 - d. Emphasized the need to build relationships with legislative staff and aides, not just legislators. Think about a broad definition of "policy makers"
 - e. Emphasis on the need to build trust and partnership. The MePCSW audience is also community, not just the Legislature
 - f. Consideration of how MePCSW's placement as a state agency impacts relationship with community partners
 - g. Suggestion about tracking the number of women that MePCSW has engaged or worked with – thinking about how to recognize outreach and work without taking undue credit
 - h. Discussion of the importance of including lived experience in the work of MePCSW
 - i. Suggestion to take a "grasstops" approach (rather than grass roots), building relationships with organizations that serve communities directly. The idea of a "mezzo organization."
 - i. Suggestion that there be a consistent drive toward the production of the biennial report so that there is not a scramble to produce reporting in a short time frame
 - j. Discussion of representation (including political representation) across Commission members
 - k. Discussion of data used in Commission research. Concern that MePCSW reports largely reflect the experience of white women in Maine. But it is the job of the Commission to reflect the issues of all women and girls. Finding ways to ensure that data is available and accessible, and that MePCSW is

filling gaps in the data and ensuring the inclusion of voices that historically are not represented

- i. Considerations: What is the Commission using the data for? What are they scrutinizing? Is it the people themselves or is it the systems that influence the data?

5. Approve Strategic Plan with edits (Elinor to carry out edits)

- a. Motion to approve: Darylen
- b. Second: Keita

Vote: Unanimous approval

Lunch and Activity

1. Activity led by Jill, telling personal narrative about why Commissioners do the work they do and what went in to shaping individual values

Presentation: Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations (PCRITP)

1. Ariel Ricci provided an overview of PCRITP
2. Considerations and learnings
 - a. Demographics of Maine are changing
 - b. Challenging norms about the whiteness of Maine and how this relates to work on racial equity
 - c. Issue with unreliable census data and the impact on race and ethnicity data in Maine
 - d. Focus on not endlessly collecting data/asking for info – how to connect with communities without asking the same questions repeatedly
3. Next Steps:
 - a. Look for opportunities for the two Commissions to collaborate, a strong united voice would be powerful

Committee Breakouts

1. Elinor provided overview of proposed Committee structure. Proposed Committees: Governance, Community Outreach, Research & Reporting, Policy & Legislation
2. Discussed proposed change for Governance Committee to consist of three co-Vice-Chairs (the Chairs of each other Committee) to streamline the process for appointment of new Chair and to support cross-Committee connection and alignment.
 - a. Concern for an overcommitment for the Chairs of other committees.
 - b. The committees will be interconnected and feed into each other– this allows for a formalization of those relationships without taking out of full commission meetings or one-on-one time with Elinor.
 - c. Some interest in keeping a Vice Chair role as separate from the Committee Chairs so that the MePCSW Chair always has backup
 - i. There can be a leadership pipeline without the formal “vice-chair” title.
3. Break into committee groups based on interests and strengths of Commissioners. Adjust numbers, discuss proposed Committee descriptions and work plans, elect Committee Chairs
4. Reconvene and debrief
 - a. Policy and Legislation Committee
 - i. Nominated Dania as Chair

- b. Research and Reporting Committee
 - i. Nominated Eisha as Chair
 - c. Community Outreach Committee
 - i. Nominated Co-Chairs, Sue and Fatuma
- 5. Approve proposed structure of Committees and the co-vice chair/committee chair model
 - a. Motion to approve: Keita
 - b. Second: Chris
 - c. Vote: Unanimous approval
- 6. Next Steps:
 - a. Individual committee meetings with Elinor in late July/early August

Wrap-Up and Meeting Evaluation Summarized and celebrated of key decisions and next steps

- 1. Note about MePCSW Member Handbooks
- 2. Commissioners filled out meeting evaluations to inform future in person work