



FAIRFAX COUNTY
COMMISSION for WOMEN
Promoting Equality for Women & Girls



BIENNIAL REPORT

FY2022—FY2023

(July 1, 2021—June 30, 2023)



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Some might argue that the county was very different when the Fairfax County Commission for Women was created back in 1971. Some might look at the achievements Fairfax County women have made over the last 50+ years and think, “Why do we still need a Commission for Women?”

We need our Commission for Women because women’s ability to vote, access health care, jobs, education, and everyday resources are at risk and remain as fragile today as it was when we were established.

Commissions focused on improving and uplifting the lives of women and girls are—still—desperately needed.

Women’s rights are human rights. Commissions give voice to the issues that women who are traditionally and historically marginalized typically face, such as racism, discrimination, and insurmountable systemic barriers.

The thoughts, concerns, and views of women are integral to progress in our society.

Without advocates dedicated to addressing the persistent and pervasive issues women face head on, women could lose access to basic, fundamental rights. Moreover, women’s commissions provide opportunities for local leaders to hear from women in their respective communities on issues that are relevant to our daily lives.

It is imperative to have commissions for women to ensure that our voices can influence and make changes that positively impact the well-being of women and girls in our community. That is what the Fairfax County Commission for Women strives to do, and why I’m honored to serve as its chair.

—Phylicia L. Woods, J.D., M.S.W.
*Chair, Fairfax County Commission
for Women*



THE FAIRFAX COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

The Fairfax County Commission for Women was established by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors on September 8, 1971. The mission of the commission is to advise the board on policies and initiatives to promote gender equality, eliminate violence against women, and honor women and girls in Fairfax County.

The commission's bylaws include an equity statement, which aligns with Fairfax County government's "*One Fairfax*" policy, which underlines the county's commitment "to promote fairness and justice in the formation of public policy that results in all residents—regardless of age, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, marital status, disability, socio-economic status or neighborhood of residence, or other

characteristics—having opportunity to fully participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to its readiness for the future, and connect to its assets and resources."

The commission is affiliated with the Fairfax County *Department of Family Services' Domestic and Sexual Violence Services* division. The division employs a liaison to coordinate commission activities and ensure compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

The commission has 14 members, including one commissioner appointed from each board member's magisterial district; four at-large commissioners appointed by the board chair, including one to represent the LGBTQIA+ community; one to represent the underserved; one transgender woman, and one at-large commissioner.



THE PURPOSES OF THE COMMISSION ARE TO:

- 1) Make recommendations and propose initiatives to the board to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex,
- 2) Advise the board on strategies to remove barriers to women and girls,
- 3) Advise the board on issues, concerns, and policies related to women and girls in the county,
- 4) Identify problems, concerns, and policies that disproportionately impact women and girls, and
- 5) Recommend and support resources, services, and opportunities that improve the status of women and girls in all aspects of life.



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

The commission publishes a biennial report to inform the board and the community about the commission's achievements and

activities during the past two fiscal years. It is organized in reverse chronological order by year.

2023

WEBINAR: VIRGINIA POST-DOBBS

In June 2023, the Commission for Women co-hosted a webinar with the Alexandria Commission for Women entitled "Virginia Post-Dobbs: A Discussion on the Status of Reproductive Healthcare Across the Commonwealth." The webinar was held near the one-year anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which overturned Roe v. Wade.

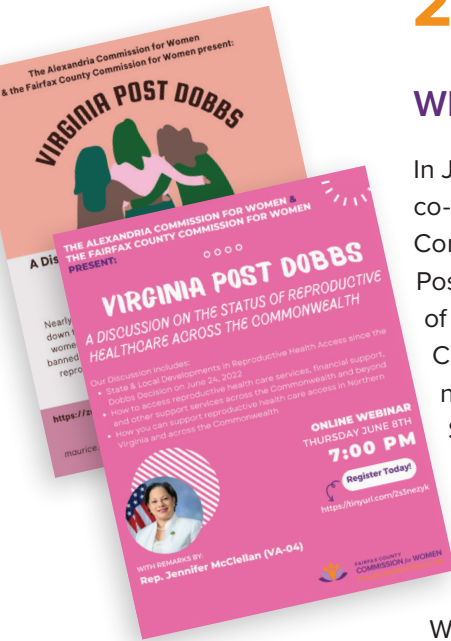
The webinar had opening remarks by Fairfax County Commission for Women Vice Chair Alyssa Batchelor and the Alexandria Commission for Women Chair Crystal Kramer. It featured remarks by Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan (VA-04) and a panel of experts and advocates who discussed the status of reproductive care in our communities and across Virginia.

The panel was moderated by Alexandria Commissioner Emily Eckert. In addition to Congresswoman McClellan, the panel included Policy Director for REPRO Rising Virginia Lexi White; Director of Operations and Strategy for the D.C. Abortion Fund

Allison Tombros Korman; and Sara Imershein, M.D., a Northern Virginia OB-GYN.

The panel gave an overview of the recent legislative session in Virginia. They reported on various bills that were passed, as well as bills that were considered, which impacted—or could impact—reproductive healthcare access in Virginia. Panelists discussed the constitutional amendment process in Virginia, informed attendees how they can help ensure access to reproductive care in Virginia, and talked about:

- ▶ Issues impacting access to reproductive care and associated support services in Virginia.
- ▶ Stresses that abortion bans and actions taken or attempted in neighboring states and jurisdictions have put on Virginia's reproductive healthcare providers and support services.
- ▶ Impacts Dobbs has had on medical providers, allied health care providers, and patients across the U.S.





SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATIONS

March is Women's History Month, and every year, the National Women's History Alliance creates a theme in commemoration. In 2023, the theme was "Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories." Its goal was to honor women storytellers in print, radio, TV, stage, podcasts, news, and social media.

The Commission for Women hosted a special event around this theme with a breakfast for community leaders that was held at Leidos' headquarters in Reston. The event was attended by several members of the Board of Supervisors and leaders from federal, state, county, and regional organizations. The event was exceptionally successful and well-received by the community.

Guests heard from keynote speaker Nancy Lyons Sargeant, an award-winning journalist

with Bloomberg Radio, and leaders from the women's commissions of Alexandria, Arlington, D.C., Fairfax City, and Loudoun. The event included a facilitated networking activity to help guests build relationships with other attendees, and a call to action from the commission's high school student representative.

The national theme for the 2022 Women's History Month was "Providing Healing, Promoting Hope." The commission created a calendar of events featuring daily activities for supporting women in the community, such as visiting the Turning Point Suffragist Memorial in Lorton, Virginia; supporting woman-owned businesses; and donating to women's shelters. The calendar was posted on the commission's website.





COMMISSION FOR WOMEN



CHAIR ON THE AIR

Commission for Women Chair Phylcia L. Woods was interviewed for the “County Magazine” TV show to talk about Women’s History Month. The program aired in March 2023.

During her interview, Woods discussed women’s historical achievements, including their work during the suffragist and Civil Rights movements and their advocacy for equal rights protection under the law.

Woods expressed that Women’s History Month allows people to reflect on and acknowledge the many ways women have created much-needed change in the world.

She pointed out that through women’s undeniably important contributions to society—from inventions to holding public office to protesting the status quo—women have improved our nation and our world.

Woods stressed how vital it is to honor women trailblazers for future generations and informed the audience about the commission’s mission to advise the Board of Supervisors on policies and initiatives that advance the status of women and girls, promote gender equality, eliminate violence against women, and advocate for progress in the workplace.



HELPING TEENS THROUGH ART

Data from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey* showed that 1 in 12 teens experience physical violence during dating relationships, and 1 in 12 teens experience sexual violence while dating. The survey also found that girls and LGBTQIA+ students have higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence than boys or heterosexual students.

In February 2023, the Commission for Women cosponsored an art contest to raise awareness of teen dating violence. The

contest was planned and hosted by the Fairfax County Department of Family Services’ Domestic and Sexual Violence Services division.

The commission sponsored five prizes for contest winners in the amount of one \$100 gift card per prize. The participants were teens between the ages of



Sculpture by student: Meklit Tesfay

12 and 19 who used their creativity to make different types of art, such as TikTok videos, paintings, and performance pieces. This year’s theme, “Awareness + Action = Social Change,” encouraged students to stand against violence in their community.

The 2023 Teen Art Contest winners were:

- ▶ Most On-Theme: Kenayah Mutombo
- ▶ Most Original: Cease Lucero
- ▶ People’s Choice: Somia Gorashi
- ▶ Most Powerful Message: Christina Oh
- ▶ Best Presentation: Lana Alekseeva

A GOAL FULFILLED

In 2020, the Commission for Women added two new seats: an at-large seat for a transgender woman, and an at-large seat for a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. The commission’s updated bylaws, which included the new seats, were approved by the Board of Supervisors in April 2021. The transgender woman seat was filled by Amber Beichler in February 2023.

The commission is proud to be the first Fairfax County board, authority, or commission to dedicate two seats to make sure the experiences and voices of LGBTQIA+ and transgender women are not lost but wholly integrated into the commission’s work.

By centering the issues and concerns of the most marginalized women in our communities, the commission positions itself to lift all women. According to *Human Rights Watch*, “the violence and discrimination that transgender people experience is deeply intersectional, with

different forms of vulnerability shaped by race, gender, class, ability and nationality, among other factors.” Transgender women experience higher rates of discrimination and violence than other populations, including the LGBTQIA+ population. The rates are even higher for transgender women of color.

Beichler, a resident of Fairfax County since 2017, brings special knowledge of a section of the population that is underserved and threatened. Currently the clerk to the board of the Transgender Education Association of the Greater Washington Area, Beichler was the speaker for the Board of Supervisors’ 2023 Pride Month proclamation in June 2023. Beichler hopes to add a unique insight to the commission, and to spread awareness of the issues impacting transgender women and the transgender and non-binary community.





COMMISSION FOR WOMEN



THE FIGHT FOR FAIR FIELDS

In August 1997, the issue of equity between boys' baseball and girls' fast-pitch softball facilities in Fairfax County was brought to the attention of the Board of Supervisors. The Department of Community and Recreation Services was tasked with developing a plan to improve girls' softball fields. With the assistance of the Action Plan Review Team—often led by the Commission for Women—progress was made. By July 2007, equity had been achieved.

However, in spring 2022, the issue resurfaced, leading to the formation of a new Action Plan Review Team. The team, which

again included the commission, assessed the current situation and presented *their findings* to the Board of Supervisors.

Six specific recommendations were made to the board, including putting \$300,000 in the fiscal year 2024 budget for maintenance of the girls' softball facility at Wakefield and allowing girls' teams to use the county's new Patriot Park sportsplex. Remaining actions and funding will be tracked by multiple county agencies to make sure girls' softball equity is a priority of mid-term and long-term planning.

This exercise serves as a reminder that the pursuit of equity for girls and women is ongoing and requires continuous effort.



HONORING WOMEN WITH FACEBOOK FRIDAYS

Part of the Commission for Women's mission is to honor Fairfax County women and girls. So, in September 2022, the commission launched a new initiative, "Facebook Fridays," to create social media content for the Department of Family Services' Facebook page. This initiative features notable Fairfax County women and girls in the areas of education, business, government, and nonprofits—along with historical county residents.

The posts began in January 2023, and include women of different ages, races, gender identities, and professional backgrounds. This diversity supports the county's One Fairfax policy—and the commission's equity statement in its bylaws—regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A Facebook search on the hashtag **#FairfaxCountyCFW** will take you to the posts.



RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

Is there equity for women and girls in Fairfax County? If not, how can we correct those inequities? The Commission for Women is part of a research effort to find out.

After the Fairfax County branch of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, of which the commission is a member, submitted a proclamation for adoption by the Board of Supervisors, the board wanted to know how women and girls are faring, specifically in the county. The board authorized the formation of a multi-disciplinary workgroup,

which includes the commission, to oversee a study to identify possible inequities for women and girls in Fairfax County.

The University of Virginia’s Biocomplexity Institute was awarded the contract in the spring of 2023.

The study will research the standing of county women and girls in areas such as economics, health, education, and leadership. Results of the study will allow the county to identify inequities and opportunities. The research report is expected in early 2024.

2022

REPORT: COVID’S IMPACT ON COUNTY WOMEN

In 2021, the Commission for Women began to research how COVID economically impacted women in Fairfax County and identify ways the commission could support women across the county in the wake of the pandemic.

The consulting firm Chmura Economics and Analytics provided baseline data on trends and employment changes in the county, and presented the data to the commission in December 2021. The commission then

collected additional data on national and state-level trends that provided more information on how women in the county were faring in the wake of the pandemic.

The research revealed that across the county, more women than men had lost their jobs, and were slower to recover from the effects of the pandemic—even when men and women had experienced job loss in the same industry.





COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

One of the primary reasons for the slow return of women to the workforce was the lack of affordable and available childcare. During the pandemic, across all industries and across the nation, caring for children primarily fell to women. Many had to sacrifice their careers to take care of their families when daycare centers were closed or childcare was unaffordable. Fairfax County was no exception.

After the commission approved the report in late 2022, the county launched a university-led research project on the status of county women (mentioned earlier in this report). The commission decided to wait and release the Chmura-based report as a companion piece to the research conducted by the University of Virginia.



NEW ERA, NEW LOGO

In the spring of 2022, the Board of Supervisors appointed several new members to the Commission for Women, and the commission marked this new period of growth by updating its logo and banner.

Members developed ideas for the new logo's look, feel, and colors. After the initial brainstorm, the commission solicited

the Fairfax County Department of Family Services' graphic artist to design the logo. The artist created a design that signifies the strength, unity, and resilience embodied by members of the commission.

The commission approved the new design at their meeting in November 2022.



FAIRFAX COUNTY COMMISSION *for* WOMEN

Promoting Equality for Women & Girls

RETREAT TO MOVE FORWARD

In August 2022, the Commission for Women held a retreat facilitated by Raven Freeborn from Legacy Healing & Therapy Services. The goal was to strengthen the commission’s standards for engagement and turn the commission’s values into group practices and norms.

Two of the most impactful exercises involved addressing internal conflict and understanding the rupture and repair processes. Commissioners used personal reflection and group discussion to express individual responses to conflict, recognize conflict-avoidant or defensive behaviors, and develop methods to help navigate conflict. After discussing the circumstances surrounding historical group conflicts, the commission identified its values and the “why” to support collective repair processes.

Members also identified future tasks and responsibilities to ensure progress on collective efforts. Members evaluated intended and unintended impacts on initiatives and discussed creating a strategic plan. The commission also clarified the relationship between the commission and the Board of Supervisors. Commissioners decided to adjust governance documents and programming to reflect alignment with the group’s mission and values.

The retreat was held at a time when almost half of the commissioners were new to the group. The retreat was valuable for building group cohesion, especially since it was the commission’s first in-person meeting after more than two years of virtual meetings during the pandemic.





RESPONDING TO DOBBS

In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade*, paving the way for individual states to ban abortions. In the wake of the court's decision, the Commission for Women issued a statement in support of access to reproductive health care and bodily autonomy in Fairfax County.

Although access to abortions has not changed in the county, the *Dobbs* decision will have—and already has had—a dire impact on many women and girls across the U.S.

Even before *Dobbs*, pregnant teens, and adults with unintended pregnancies, were at an increased risk of domestic violence, according to *the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*. *The National Partnership for Women and Families* reports that for many women, domestic violence starts or gets worse when they become pregnant.

Additionally, the *Suicide Prevention Resource Center* reports homicide makes up almost one-third of maternal injury deaths, and *Harvard researchers* found domestic violence kills more pregnant women each year than any other cause. The *Dobbs* decision means pregnant victims/survivors of domestic violence are now at greater risk because of more limited choices.

The commission recognized the people who will be most impacted by legislation that limits reproductive rights are those who are already at the economic and social margins of society – people who are already struggling to make ends meet.

The commission chose to release a statement to express full solidarity with women, girls, and people in Fairfax County who are seeking to make personal life, reproductive, and healthcare decisions. The full statement can be read at Fairfaxcounty.gov/CFW.



2021



MARKING 50 YEARS OF SERVICE

The Commission for Women was founded in 1971 and celebrated its 50th anniversary

with an online event called “Fireside Chat” in December 2021.

A rousing sing-along to Helen Reddy’s hit song “I Am Woman” opened the event and set its tone. Current chair Phylcia L. Woods welcomed guests, and the Chair of the Board of Supervisors Jeff McKay made remarks by video.

The Vice Chair of the Board of Supervisors Penny Gross and supervisors Kathy Smith and Dalia Palchik presented a proclamation honoring the commission’s 50 years of service. Keynote speaker Glenda Booth, the commission’s first chair in 1971, received the proclamation on behalf of the commission.

In her talk, Booth described the environment of the time when women were

again organizing a movement for rights. She told about the challenges the commission faced in the early 1970s. “Introducing the Commission for Women into a male-dominated policy arena was no easy task,” Booth said. “We have come a long way, but a lot remains to be done!”

Following highlights of recent achievements, guests were invited to make comments. Participants included past commission chairs Pamela McCoach and Maggi Luca, current and former commissioners and staff, and friends.

MAKING RULES ACCESSIBLE

In the summer of 2021, the Commission for Women created a new *Policies and Procedures* document to hold enduring commission policies, which supplements the commission’s bylaws. The commission endorsed the document at its October 2021 meeting.

Later, the commission expanded it to include an annual calendar and new policies concerning the return to in-person meetings as the coronavirus pandemic wound down.

The goal of the document is to have one prominent place that makes it far easier

to find particular policies or procedures when needed.

In June 2023, the commission incorporated text from the *Commissioner Guide*, formerly maintained by staff, into the revised and renamed *Operating Policies and Procedures*. The document will be published on the commission’s website and made available to new commissioners as an important part of their orientation.





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CURRENT COMMISSIONERS AS OF JUNE 30, 2023

Alyssa Batchelor—*At-Large*

Amber Beichler—*At-Large Trans Woman*

Helen Cole—*Hunter Mill District*

Emily McCoy—*Ex Officio*

Pamela Montecinos—*Sully District*

Mattie Palmore—*At-Large Underserved*

Carla Post—*Dranesville District*

Enjoli Ramsey—*Braddock District*

Sabrina Rose-Smith—*Mason District*

Alesia Taylor-Boyd—*Lee District*

Jordan Tautges—*Springfield District*

Lanita Thweatt—*Mt. Vernon District*

Phylicia Woods—*Providence District*

FORMER COMMISSIONERS JULY 1, 2021–JUNE 30, 2023

Dena Bashri—*Sully District*

Annika Khandelwal—*At-Large
Student Representative*

Jane Materna—*Mason District*

Shafuq Naseem—*Braddock District*

Alessandra Simmons-Robles—*At-Large
Student Representative*

Lisa Sales—*Mt. Vernon District*

Julie Waters—*Dranesville District*

STAFF

Toni Zollicoffer, *Director*
Department of Family Services' Domestic &
Sexual Violence Services Division

Lois Kirkpatrick, *Staff Liaison to the
Commission for Women and Strategic Plan
Coordinator*

Department of Family Services' Domestic &
Sexual Violence Services Division



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