

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUITY
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 14, 2025**

ATTENDANCE: Kristina Testa-Buzzee, Chair; Sharon Baanante, Joy Futaba DeJaeger, Emma Dignoti, Shannon O'Toole Giandurco, Jasmine Prezzie

OTHERS: Melvette Hill, Connecticut Commission On Women, Children, Seniors, Equity And Opportunity Executive Director; Michelle Woods Matthews, Communications Director; Ms. Simone

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Testa-Buzzee called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Testa-Buzzee called the roll. A quorum was present.

**GUEST SPEAKER: MS. MELVETTE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON WOMEN, CHILDREN, SENIORS, EQUITY
AND OPPORTUNITY**

Ms. Testa-Buzzee introduced Ms. Hill, the Communications Director for the CT Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity. Ms. Hill greeted the Commissioners and then read the following into the record:

HB 7214- An Act Concerning Maternal Health. This bill establishes a task force to study perinatal mental health care, establishes a report card for birth centers and hospitals providing maternity care, and requires the Commissioner of Public Health to convene an advisory committee to study doula-friendly practices in hospitals. This bill has been tabled for the House Calendar.

And

HB 7102- An Act Concerning Maternal And Infant Healthcare

This bill develops a strategy to increase birth centers and birthing hospitals in underserved regions of the State with a high percentage of Medicaid recipients, increase Medicaid reimbursements for doulas, and expand the role of fathers in supporting maternal and infant health. Both 7214 and 7104 support reproductive justice-aligned policies, improving the lives of black mothers and birthing women to improve

reproductive health disparities and inequities, including birthing facility accountability, lactation, and maternal mental health.

HB 5986 - An Act Establishing A Refundable Child Tax Credit Against the Personal Income Tax

This bill supports a tax credit of \$600 per child (up to three children) in Connecticut in alignment with the reproductive justice principles of being able to afford to raise a child in a safe and sustainable environment. This bill puts money back in the pockets of families. The refundable credit means that families who do not have a tax liability would receive the full amount and be able to utilize these funds to purchase essential items.

Ms. Hill said that Connecticut is lagging behind in this area because there are many states that offer a tax credit on personal income tax. The United Way is strongly supporting this.

Ms. Hill said that there was also an act to mitigate benefit cliffs, which is when a resident is accessing public benefits such as SNAP or Care for Kids, and their income increases due to a promotion at work or a new job. This will make their eligibility decrease and they lose the benefits. Connecticut is one of the first states to take this on and attempt to have changes made. A feasibility study was done last year and recommendations were made. Now they are working on moving a pilot program along with the State of Maine through the legislature. The goal was to have a pot of money where the state legislature would determine when to phase out an individual's benefits, but this effort is currently paused.

Ms. Hill said that there would be some upcoming events. She said that there were concerns that by 2030, a significant number of women would be losing their jobs due to Artificial Intelligence. Many of the jobs that will be phased out to AI include entry level office jobs that are held by women of color. She said that she could send out the slide deck and recording to the Commission members. While STEM jobs and health care professional positions will increase, other jobs such as Customer Service and sales and office support will decrease due to AI. It will also include food service. Only 5% of women are in STEM positions. Ms. Hill said that her Commission is looking to bring the AI Academy to kindergarten students and others. Quantum computing is coming. It is important to have the little ones excited about these new developments.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee noted that a member of the public was present and participating in the meeting.

Ms. Hill spoke about an Equitable AI Forum on February 28th. This focused on the impact on Black communities through the lens of health care, housing, workforce and education. This affects women as well in all those categories.

On May 3, 2025 at 10 a.m. there will be a free program titled "Real Talk: Breaking the Silence on Menopause: at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. There will be a screening of a film titled "The (M) Factor" about menopause. All are welcomed.

Ms. Baanante thanked Ms. Hill for her presentation and said that it was incredible work. She noted that there was a group for the LGBTQ+ Justice and Opportunity Network. She asked for more information on this.

Ms. Hill said that there were a number of subcommittees, councils and taskforces that are statutory requirements and also the Commission attends an additional number. The LGBTQ+ Justice and Opportunity Network was placed under the umbrella of the Commission and the funding comes through the judicial branch. There is an administrator and they also have a Board. They are independent in what they do, but the Commission has policy analysts that work together with the Network on various issues such as educational social/emotional learning. This also includes analyzing how students are being bullied and whether students are being held accountable for bullying behavior.

Ms. Baanante said that Ms. Hill had mentioned the impact on AI on women and wished to know if there was a specific STEM bill that they were working on related to that. Ms. Hill said that SB2 was focused on that. That is an large omnibus bill that would include AI and women.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee asked what a City wide Commission like the Norwalk Commission on Gender Equity might be able to do to help advocate for the constituents. Ms. Hill said that she was about the voice of the Commission. This is the thing that can turn the tide and legislators have stood up to say they received 12 calls from constituents about a particular issue. She added that they were discussing creating a safe space for people who feel they don't have a voice and are afraid because of the current climate, whether it is perceived or real.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee said that the Commission has a fairly active Policy and Advocacy Committee with a few others.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Simone asked about the McKenzie research that Ms. Hill had mentioned during her presentation. Ms. Hill said that there was additional research and referred to "The Future of Jobs" report by the McKenzie Global Institute. She said that she would be happy to share that information with Ms. Simone.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee thanked Ms. Hill and noted that in the past, they had Representative Dominique Johnson and Representative Gilchrist present to the Commission. Next month, Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz will be addressing the Commission. The Commission has a responsibility to be bipartisan.

OLD BUSINESS

**** MS. BAANANTE MOVED TO REORDER THE AGENDA.**

**** MS. FUTABA DEJAEGER SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. Committee Updates

• Community outreach

Ms. Testa-Buzzee said that Ms. Prezzie and Ms. O'Toole Giandurco had not had the opportunity to meet since the last meeting. Ms. Prezzie had asked for some feedback on social media. Ms. Prezzie said that Ms. Murillo had suggested a group photo and to reintroduce the Commission to the public.

Ms. Testa Buzzee spoke about posting events with Ms. Woods Matthews. She added that it will be important in developing a timeline for an event. Right now the Commission is down three members.

Ms. Testa Buzzee said that she had checked with Ms. Murillo about the Commission's ability to partner with community agencies and such. Ms. Murillo suggested that she contact the Corporation Counsel's Office and they have said that unless there is an ethical issue involved, there should be no reason preventing the Commission partnering with another organization like the Triangle Center or The Haven.

Ms. O'Toole Giandurco told Ms. Simone that Ms. Woods Matthews had just gotten back from a leave and that the Commission would be in contact with her soon about an update.

• Policy advocacy

Ms. Baanante said that the Legislative Policy and Advocacy Committee had identified several groups that they would like to work with. They are looking at the LGBTQ+ community, health care, domestic violence, sexual abuse and child care issues. All of these groups intersect. As they establish relationships, they should be able to get the advocacy group moving forward. She listed a number of other organizations such as the DVCC that they would be reaching out to over the coming weeks. She said that there would be discussions on creating letters of support or concern on various issues and how this process is done.

Ms. Testa Buzzee pointed out that the letter advocacy could have two aspects, one as a Commission endorsing an issue and a potential second aspect where templates are drafted for others to send to the legislation. Discussion followed.

A. Norwalk Recreation and Parks presentation follow up

Ms. Testa Buzzee said that Parks and Rec had given a presentation and said that while it was a wonderful presentation, the Commission is not quite ready to mobilize to support all these events. Ms. Futaba DeJaeger said that was her first meeting and she was so pleased to hear the presentation. Discussion followed about checking in with Rec and Parks about supporting their programs.

Ms. Baanante said that it would be important to see if there is any data about gender break out of the sports participants.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Commission engagement and vacancies

Ms. Testa Buzzee said that she was looking for a way to say thank you to all the Commission members for all their hard work. It will be important to keep looking for additional Commission members. The Policy and Advocacy group is making slow, steady progress. She encouraged all the Commissioners to submit potential names for Commissioners. Discussion followed.

Ms. O'Toole Giandurco said that there was some confusion about the website and the Commission information. Ms. Woods Matthews said that she would look into it.

Ms. Testa Buzzee said that the QR code appeared to be mis-directed.

B. Engagement with city events related to our mission

Ms. Testa Buzzee said if anyone knows of upcoming events that would be of interest, please pass the information along.

Ms. O'Toole Giandurco said that Norwalk Day will be happening at the Capitol and she will send more information and details to the Commissioners. Ms. Baanante asked if it would be possible to have a table on Gender Equity at the Capitol for that event. Ms. O'Toole Giandurco said she would let everyone know. It is an annual event, so they can also plan for next year.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. O'TOOLE GIANDURCO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. PREZZIE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services