



REGULAR MEETING – NORWALK COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUITY AGENDA

JULY 14, 2025, 7:00 PM

HYBRID MEETING: HELD IN ROOM 101 AT CITY HALL AND BY ZOOM

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting in person in room 101 at City Hall or by telephone and/or Zoom, or a recording in the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at norwalkct.gov/meetings.



Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email Michelle Woods Matthews at mwoodsmatthews@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

- I. **CALL TO ORDER**
- II. **ROLL CALL**
- III. **ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**
 - A. **Approval of Minutes of previous meetings of June 9, 2025**
- IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT**
- V. **UPDATES FROM THE COMMITTEES**
 - A. Legislative Advocacy Committee Updates on bylaws modification
 - B. Outreach Committee Updates on Data Regarding Sports Participation
- VI. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Priority topics and time commitments, including survey results and City resources
- B. Commission Calendar, including legislative priorities, Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Awards program

VII. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Summary of items

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUITY
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE, 9, 2025
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDANCE: Kristina Testa Buzzee, Ph.D; Chair: Shannon O’Toole Giandurco; Co-Vice Chair, Ivonne Zucco; Co-Vice Chair, Sharon Baanante. Joy DeJaegar, Emma Dignoti, Kim Squires

STAFF: Michelle Woods-Matthews

OTHER: Susan Bysiewicz; Lieutenant Governor

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Testa-Buzzee called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

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

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Discuss and vote to approve the Minutes from the April 14, 2025 meeting

**** MS. O’TOOLE-GIANDURCO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES.**

**** MS. DIGNOTI SECONDED THE MOTION**

Ms. Testa-buzzee requested to be referred to as Dr. Testa-Buzzee from now on.

Ms. Baanante requested an addition to the reference to SB1438 (Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation) and HB6078 (Act Concerning the Availability of Emergency Contraception on Campuses of Higher Education) discussed by Ms. Hill.

On page five, first sentence, Ms. Baanante asked to add “and programs offered” to request data by gender for both sports participants and offered programs.

**** THE MOTION AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No one was available for public participation.

V. GUEST SPEAKER, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, SUSAN BYSIEWICZ

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz addressed the Commission, expressing disappointment that Connecticut has not yet passed the Female Genital Mutilation ban, which leaves 2,500 women and girls at risk. She pledged support to reintroduce the legislation next year.

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz summarized recent reproductive rights legislation:

- In 2022, Connecticut passed the Reproductive Freedom Defense Act, protecting providers treating out-of-state patients and authorizing advanced practice clinicians to perform abortion care.
- In 2023, pharmacists were granted authority to prescribe certain birth control methods, increasing access, particularly in healthcare deserts.

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz said Connecticut has seen an increase in patients traveling from out-of-state due to bans elsewhere. She indicated a fund has been established to assist out-of-state patients seeking reproductive care. She noted protections were added to prohibit the unauthorized disclosure of abortion-related medical information.

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz noted emergency contraception vending machines were launched in partnership with UConn's School of Pharmacy. She stated a new continuing education course will support pharmacist training under the expanded prescribing laws.

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz stated a new law allows minors to receive contraception and prenatal care without parental consent. She also noted constitutional amendment was proposed to expand the equality clause to explicitly protect reproductive rights and gender-affirming care. Despite significant public testimony, the proposal did not advance to a legislative vote this session and thus will not appear on the ballot.

Ms. Baanante thanked the Lieutenant Governor for her advocacy and asked if any legislation from the other 22 states in the Reproductive Freedom Alliance stood out as models for Connecticut.

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz responded that Connecticut is currently leading in many areas of reproductive rights, though she acknowledged that the state is behind in constitutional protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. She emphasized the need to reintroduce and pass the equality amendment next year. She noted that ballot measures on reproductive rights typically

succeed across political lines and encouraged advocacy with local legislators to support the amendment.

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz -also raised concerns about federal threats to Medicaid, emphasizing the importance of advocating for continued support, particularly as nearly one million Connecticut residents rely on the program, including many in Norwalk.

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz resumed with an emphasis on the scope and scale of Medicaid coverage in Connecticut. Nearly one million out of 3.6 million residents—including children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, veterans, and seniors—are insured under Medicaid, making it the largest insurance program in the state. The Lieutenant Governor noted that proposed federal cuts to Medicaid would disproportionately impact women, and urged the commission to prioritize Medicaid advocacy.

Dr. Testa-Buzzee raised a question regarding how the Norwalk Commission could engage with the Governor's Council on Women and Girls, especially as Norwalk is one of the few municipalities with such a commission. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz encouraged engagement and advised reaching out to her General Counsel, Tracy Opoku. The commission was invited to become a “friend of the council” and participate in quarterly meetings featuring notable speakers from various fields, including reproductive rights, STEM, law enforcement, and public service. The council also hosts leadership panels and contributes to proposed legislation such as the bans on child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGMC). Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz highlighted the council's role in submitting legislative proposals to the Governor annually. Dr. Testa-Buzzee noted the past support from Representative Dominique Johnson in reestablishing the Norwalk Commission.

Dr. Testa-Buzzee acknowledged Representative Johnson’s contributions and expressed enthusiasm about potential collaborations with the council. Commissioners expressed interest in participating in leadership panels and highlighted the strength of women serving on the Norwalk commission who could contribute meaningfully. The Lieutenant Governor mentioned ongoing partnerships with the Commission on Women, Seniors, and Families, and upcoming events, such as Female Veterans Day on June 12 at the State Capitol.

Ms. Dignoti asked about the strategic approach to grouping or separating constitutional amendment issues for the ballot. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz responded that combining both could build a broader coalition, citing New York’s success using this approach. She stated the current thinking is that the issues naturally align under Connecticut’s equal protection clause and could garner strong, unified support, though she would support either method.

Ms. O’Toole Giandurco thanked the Lieutenant Governor for her advocacy and leadership, particularly on women's rights, sharing her experience attending Norwalk Day and expressing pride in being a Connecticut resident and a mother raising a daughter. The Lieutenant Governor expressed gratitude and encouraged continued connection with the council.

Dr. Testa-Buzzees suggested a summary of what was said by the speakers to be shared, possibly through social media. She recognized and thanked the speakers and acknowledged that although

progress may feel slow, the commission is gaining traction in identifying strategic actions ahead of the next legislative session. Ms.Zucco was also acknowledged for her contributions.

I. WELCOME NEW COMMISSIONER, KIM SQUIRES

Ms. Squires was welcomed and introduced as a new member. Dr. Testa-Buzzee mentioned sending Ms. Squires background information and resumes for current members to ensure she has context about the group's experience.

II. UPDATES FROM THE COMMITTEES

A. Legislative Advocacy Committee

A brief update from the Legislative Advocacy Committee followed. Ms.Dignati stated the committee is currently finalizing legislative priorities and will meet following this meeting to review which bills passed. She noted they aim to present a shortlist of priorities for a commission vote at the next meeting.

Ms. Futaba-DeJaegar shared that she met with Will Schwarzstein from Norwalk Recreation and Parks, who expressed strong support for girls' programming. Ms. Futaba-DeJaegar indicated he is open to feedback from participants and parents and is interested in introducing new sports. She offered to act as a liaison and noted that recent girls' volleyball enrollment reached 120 participants. Dr. Testa-Buzzee asked if Ms. Futaba-DeJaegar could request enrollment data from Mr. Schwarzstien, including sports breakdowns and trends over time, to track program impact. Ms. Futaba-DeJaegar confirmed that Mr. Schwarzstein is compiling the data and expects to have it once the current sessions conclude.

B. Outreach Committee

Dr. Testa-Buzzee discussed the Outreach Committee. Who met to clarify the commission's scope and engagement parameters. She stated they are seeking guidance to ensure alignment with city guidelines while staying true to the commission's mission. Ms. Squires, with her media background, may assist with social media efforts, pending content development. Dr. Testa-Buzzee acknowledged the need to draft a calendar for outreach planning and accepted responsibility for initiating that task.

III. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. O'Tool-Giandurco introduced a new business item regarding the Outreach Committee. She noted that while larger events have been difficult to manage, a smaller, focused initiative might be more feasible.

Ms. O'Tool-Giandurco shared her recent experience as a judge at Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy's STEAM Day, where students presented on water conservation. She was struck by the lack of confidence among the female students, who turned inward or away while presenting. In contrast, the male students were more willing to speak, even without full participation in the project.

Ms. O'Tool-Giandurco proposed a small-scale mentorship effort—such as one hour per month per board member—to help young girls build confidence by connecting with professional women in the community. She emphasized the lasting impact the event had on her and encouraged the board to consider this as a future priority.

Members agreed the issue was important. A similar pattern in public speaking classes was noted though improvement is often seen over time. The board expressed support for exploring mentorship through the Outreach Committee.

Ms. Baanante noted the discussion was very disheartening. She shared that she works with college students on career development and found the topic relevant. She suggested potentially partnering with a nonprofit already working with children and joining efforts through volunteer engagement, such as a day of service. Ms. Baanante noted knowing of one nonprofit but welcomed suggestions from the group. Dr. Testa-Buzzee mentioned the Fund for Women and Girls as a possible connection and suggested the Norwalk Acts. Sharon asked if Christina had a connection, and Christina confirmed she knew someone on the board. Sharon emphasized the importance of the Commission serving not only as doers but also as facilitators.

Ms. Baanante acknowledged Pride Month and reminded the group of TCC's Pride in the Park event scheduled for June 14th at Veterans Park from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. She stated is a free, family-friendly event with a booth hosted by Norwalk Public Schools. She noted the Commission did not have a table this year, and suggested the Outreach Committee be intentional in selecting future events.

Dr. Testa-Buzzee asked about the meeting schedule, seeking confirmation on whether a July meeting was planned, as the Commission holds ten meetings per year. Ms. Zucco clarified that the Commission skips August but does meet in July. The group agreed to hold the July meeting in person on Monday, July 14th. Dr. Testa-Buzzee indicated she would coordinate with Ms. Woods-Matthews to confirm the location, likely City Hall.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Zucco brought up the request regarding the provision of menstrual hygiene products in public buildings. She noted that Bob Kocienda, who leads a youth leadership group at Brien McMahon High School, had previously approached the Commission about a student-led campaign to make menstrual products available in public facilities. She indicated progress was stalled due to the lack of vendor pricing necessary to develop a budget. Mr. Kocienda has asked whether the Commission is still interested in pursuing this initiative. The proposal includes

placing products in buildings such as City Hall, libraries, community centers, museums, and park facilities. Options discussed included providing products at front desks or through vending machines.

Ms. Baanante raised the point that this might be a project more appropriate for the Mayor's Office or Common Council, with the Commission serving as advocates rather than implementers. Ms. Zucco clarified that advocacy is the intended role. The project had previously stalled due to the inability to get pricing information from Norwalk Public Schools, which handles products through a vendor managed by the Health Department.

Ms. Baanante and other members agreed that more information is needed to clarify the Commission's role. There was mention of prior Commission involvement in discussions around menstrual equity legislation. Dr. Testa-Buzzee offered to review past meeting minutes and asked Ms. Zucco to assist. She proposed the Commission request a status update from the City regarding the legislation and its implementation. Ms. Zucco noted that laws often pass without funding, making them difficult to enforce. The Commission agreed it cannot mandate or fund projects but has an obligation to give voice to important community issues.

Dr. Testa-Buzzee committed to gathering additional information before the next meeting. She noted the need to revisit the Commission's previously established priorities, acknowledging the impact of shifting societal needs. A reassessment of priorities was recommended to help align future work with the Commission's mission and current realities.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. FUTABA-DE JAEGAR MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

**** MS. DIGNOTI SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
China Mayhew
Telesco Secretarial Services