Report & Recommendations to the Community & the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners



Presented April 15, 2021

Background

A resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) of Hamilton County, Ohio, July 19, 2017 established the volunteer Commission on Women and Girls. The Commission consists of twenty (20) women members and ten (10) student members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.

The HCCWG operates with the following purpose:

The Commission shall make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners and local government jurisdictions to eliminate any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field.

The Commission shall facilitate partnerships between government, nonprofit, and business, which will support the mission of the Commission on Women and Girls.

The Commission shall promote and encourage women to seek leadership positions in society, and help girls to develop leadership skills.

The Commission shall develop public information and/or education campaigns to support the mission of the Commission on Women and Girls.

Executive Summary

As we reflect on the past year, we see it was one full of challenges that many have not experienced in their lifetimes. While the devastating impact of lives lost to the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we see the world, it has also created unprecedented challenges in the workplace with the greatest impact on women.

According to the McKinney Institute, women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses. The abrupt closure of schools and businesses to curb the spread of the virus has expanded gender inequality as women grappled with issues such as inadequate childcare and loss of wages.

Much like many other businesses and organizations, the work of the HCCWC moved virtual with engaging discussions on how we could continue our work while also responding to the present reality. This led to a powerful PSA that spoke to some of the challenges that women and girls were facing due to the pandemic and offered support and resources. Additionally, with the partnership of Professor Stefanie Pettys and her class from the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash, we rebranded to better reflect our values and diversity. Both can be seen on the Commission's website.

In our first two years, we worked to address gender disparities and enact sustainable changes through recommendations and partnerships with civic organizations, community partners and local government entities.

With vast and varied issues facing women and girls, we worked to build upon recommendations made in prior years, while also developing new initiatives to empower, promote and protect women and girls in the county. As such, we chose to focus on initiatives related to student homelessness, pay equity, access to menstrual products, and gender-based violence.

Access to Menstrual Products

Equitable access to menstrual products isn't just a matter of public health – it has long-term implications for education and self-esteem. A 2019 study found that more than four in five U.S. students have either missed class time, or know someone who has, because they did not have access to menstrual products. The HCCWG recommends that menstrual products be readily available at no cost in restrooms of schools and public buildings as a way to preserve and protect student dignity.

We also know that mental health stress has increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and generational gaps and stigmas still exist about seeking mental health support. Resources are readily available locally, but people don't always know where to find them. We recommend that the county and each school district have a clear and easily accessible list of mental health resources available on their websites which is widely and regularly communicated to students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

Student Homelessness

There are approximately 4,000 students experiencing homeless in Hamilton County. These students face unique challenges – including navigating the social services and health networks available to them and their families. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, public schools are required to appoint a homeless liaison responsible for identifying homeless students, ensuring school enrollment and attendance, and proving opportunities for academic success. This federal legislation also provides funding for these services. We are raising awareness of the prevalence of this issue by asking schools to make the homeless students' rights, available services and contact information easily accessible.

Gender-Based Violence

We are working to connect with adolescent survivors of gender-based harassment and destignatize the psychological effects of violence, harassment, and bullying. To empower girls to speak up for themselves and others, we have partnered with Hamilton County to create a social media campaign that can be shared with students and school administrators.

To begin to heal, it is important to connect girls with professional resources so that they know their rights, understand the chain of reporting both in and out of school, and recognize that they are not alone.

Pay Equity Pledge

We are working to help close the gender and race-based pay gap in Hamilton County by asking employers in key industries to sign an Equal Pay Commitment. The HCCWG has been working to provide data, information and resources to employers to help them evaluate and address the issue of gender wage gap in a direct, fair and transparent way using a voluntary, employer-led Equal Pay Commitment. By signing, leading organizations will pledge to conduct gender-based pay audits across departments and positions and develop internal practices to address and eliminate pay disparities.

It is this advocacy work that makes us proud to be members of the Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls. We hope to continue to connect individuals, organizations and agencies to make a greater impact. By focusing on dismantling barriers, providing support and improving the economic position of women and girls we hope to empower women and girls across the county to reach their highest potential.

Appreciatively,

The Commissioners of the 2020 Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls

Recommendations

To the Board of County Commissioners

- Create and continue campaigns and public service announcements to ensure that county residents are being reached with mental health resources, and continue to have consistent, easily accessible, straightforward list of mental health resources available on their website with guidance specific to different audiences (parents, students, teachers, friends, etc.)
- Support the recommendation to the school districts that they implement free programs from appropriate community experts and providers to educate girls and educators on how to address gender-based harassment and assault
- Use the County social media to post once a month on the topic of gender-based harassment
- Revisit annually the social media campaign created by the Safety Subcommittee that lives on the County's Instagram account
- Develop an appropriate format and platform for Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights on the County webpage to expand families' access to critical information when facing homelessness.
- Promote Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights information as reasonable and appropriate to public school districts, county agencies, boards and commissions and to residents of Hamilton County.
- Sign the Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment and encourage other employers in the county and vendors that work with the county to also sign the Commitment.

To the Community

- School districts and public facilities within Hamilton County should institute a program of providing accessible menstrual products at no cost to students and constituents in ways that preserve and protect the dignity of menstruating people.
- Federal elected officials should look to expand federal policy or assistance to cover menstrual products.
- The Ohio legislature that funding in the Ohio state budget should be allocated to enable schools and public buildings across Ohio to offer menstrual products at no cost
- School districts within Hamilton County should have a consistent, easily accessible, straightforward list of mental health resources available on their website, which is widely communicated to students, teachers, administrators, and parents on a regular basis.
- Schools should make the McKinney-Vento Act information easily available on their websites, including "what your rights are, what services we offer and who to contact."
- Schools should share the HCBOCC weblink annually with their families to amplify the community's awareness of services and rights of homeless students and their families.
- School districts should partner with organizations that provide free programs to girls and educators on how to address gender-based harassment and assault.
- Employers from each of six key industries headquartered or doing business in Hamilton County education, healthcare, retail, banking, food service, and non-profits should sign the Equal Pay Commitment and encourage peer organizations to also sign the Commitment.

To the Next Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls

- Create a marketing campaign to amplify access to critical services for students experiencing Create a marketing campaign to amplify access to critical services for students experiencing homelessness.
- Explore ways to stay in contact with students beyond high school aged 18 to 25 as they transition into independence, including supporting state and federal legislation and programs.
- Explore the longer-term possibility of connecting community resources to create a one-stop service information resource for Hamilton County families who are struggling with or at risk of homelessness.
- Work with HCBOCC to develop an appropriate format for Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights infographic, and ask public school districts to review and offer input/edit as they see fit for the needs of their district.
- Explore the longer-term possibility of connecting community resources to create a one-stop service information resource for Hamilton County families who are struggling with or at risk of homelessness.
- Create a marketing campaign to amplify access to critical services, including PSAs, signs in school and out, and other ways of including the voices of students experiencing homelessness.
- Explore more effective ways to stay in contact with students beyond high school aged 18 to 25 as they transition into independence. They continue to need more robust positive reinforcement/mentoring/access to social services to help them establish a stable foundation into adulthood. Reach out to state and federal legislators who have expressed interest in this vulnerable population to determine what bills are currently working through the legislative process and/or what areas we might do further research and discuss further legislation that they may be interested in developing.
- Continue pay equity research, provide employers with regular updates on best practices, and explore ways to educate working women and girls on pay equity and empower them with negotiation strategies.

Committee Work

Health & Self-Identity Committee

Initiative: Equitable Access to Menstrual Products

Promote equitable access to menstrual education and products for the women and girls of Hamilton County, especially for middle-school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideally, menstrual products should be readily available in restrooms of schools and public buildings.

Those who menstruate pay a hefty price when period supplies are not free - it's a matter of economic justice and public health: Stigma, poverty, and a lack of access negatively impact education and development. We want all who menstruate to feel empowered, safe, and confident about having their period.

Research/Justification:

- Research has demonstrated 1 in 5 U.S. teens struggle to afford period products or haven't been able to purchase them. 84% of teen students have either missed class time or know someone who has because they didn't have access to menstrual products. (State of the Period, Thinx & PERIOD, 2019)
- According to Period, Inc., as of November 7, 2019, 33 US States still have a sales tax on period products considering them non-essential items. However, one in four women currently struggle to afford period products due to a lack of income (www.allianceforperiodsupplies.org/).
- Nearly one in five girls in the U.S. have left school early, or missed school entirely because they didn't have access to menstrual products. (Always Confidence and Puberty Study, Nov. 2017; based on females 16-24 years old; 2016 U.S. census.). Aside from missing class and school, students are often forced to use menstrual items for long stretches of time, which puts them at higher risk for cervical cancer, toxic shock syndrome, and other health issues resulting from product overuse, research shows. ((UNICEF) Menstrual Hygiene Keep to Keeping Girls in School: http://unicef.in/Story/122/Menstrual-Hygiene-Key-to-Keeping-Girls-in-School)

Recommendations

- School districts and public facilities within Hamilton County should institute a program of providing accessible menstrual products at no cost to students and constituents in ways that preserve and protect the dignity of menstruating people.
- Federal elected officials should look to expand federal policy or assistance to cover menstrual products.
- The Ohio legislature that funding in the Ohio state budget should be allocated to enable schools and public buildings across Ohio to offer menstrual products at no cost

Initiative: Increase Access to Mental Health Resources

Increase simplification and communication about access to mental health resources for the women and girls of Hamilton County, especially for middle-school students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental health stress has increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic due to isolation, loss, fear, anxiety, difficulties of online education, and more. Generational gaps and stigmas still exist between parents and students about seeking mental health support. Resources are available in the county, but people don't always know where to find them, and often the resource documents are lengthy, overwhelming, and hard to navigate.

Research/Justification

- Between mid-February and mid-March 2020, prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications rose 34.1%, antidepressants rose 18.6%, and anti-insomnia drugs rose 14.8%. (Express Scripts, April 2020)
- Between April and October 2020, hospital emergency departments reported a rise in the share of total visits from kids for mental health needs. "Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health-related visits for children aged 5–11 and 12–17 years increased approximately 24% and 31%, respectively." (CDC, November 2020)
- In the Greater Cincinnati COVID-19 Health Issues Survey, 32% of adults said their mental health had gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and young adults and women specifically were reported even higher declines (40% and 39%, respectively). (Cincinnati Enquirer, March 26, 2021)

Recommendations

- Create and continue campaigns and public service announcements to ensure that county residents are being reached with mental health resources, and continue to have consistent, easily accessible, straightforward list of mental health resources available on their website with guidance specific to different audiences (parents, students, teachers, friends, etc.)
- School districts within Hamilton County should have a consistent, easily accessible, straightforward list of mental health resources available on their website, which is widely communicated to students, teachers, administrators, and parents on a regular basis.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrea Bertels Samantha Jenike Alexis Knoblauch Jenifer Moore Yasmeen Porter Mary Wineberg

Social Mobility Committee

Initiative: Advocating for Students who are Homeless

The Social Mobility Subcommittee's goals this year have been to understand the unique challenges of homeless students and the Social Services/Health Networks available to them and their families. This initiative would expand HCC website's offerings of critical services to the community at-large. The link has the potential to form stronger partnerships with area school districts, social service agencies and other non-profits already working with our most vulnerable students and their families. The long-term goal of this initiative is to raise awareness of the prevalence of this issue and educating key community leaders, the community-at-large, elected officials, and other potential partners of the unique challenges facing homeless students, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research/Justification

According to Upspring Cincinnati, each year more than 4,000 students experience homelessness in Greater Cincinnati. In a pre-COVID-19 world, and guided by federal requirements, local public schools have done a good job of tracking and linking critical services with students and their families experiencing homelessness. COVID-19 has created continuous disruptions to in-school learning and dramatically made tracking and getting critical services much more problematic for the most vulnerable students and their families.

Without the everyday observations, within the education community, that might identify changes in behavior, attendance, etc. students are falling through the cracks. Added emotional and economic stresses on families living in poverty is a destabilizing factor and evictions are on the rise.

Ways to further understanding the unique challenges of homeless students and the Social Service/Health Networks available to homeless students:

- Reach out to the schools that our HCCWG student members attend to learn more about their programs and how we could help amplify their good work.
- Interview key agencies that focus on the homeless student population.
- Reviewing existing websites, databases, and apps currently in circulation.

Initially, we interviewed individuals associated with homelessness issues that included parents, educators, social service agencies, as well as students.

We reviewed State Department of Education homelessness resources. We learned that public school districts are required to ensure that all children and youth, including preschoolers, have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education, as non-homeless children and youth. These requirements are administered by the state and funded by the federally-authorized McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Program. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, every school district is required to appoint a liaison. Homeless Liaisons are school staff members responsible for identifying homeless students, ensuring school enrollment and attendance, and providing opportunities for academic success.

Most recently, we reviewed the websites of the 22 Hamilton County Public School Districts and found that critical information that students and families experiencing homelessness would need was not easily available.

In collaboration with Housing Opportunities Made Equal and Women Helping Women, the committee also hosted a webinar "Happy, Health and Housed" designed to provide information to young women 15-24 as the move into independent living, a very vulnerable time that can often lead to homelessness.

The sponsoring organizations were so happy with the concept and presentation that they designed a further series of similar workshops, offering another "Happy, Health and Housed" for young members.

Recommendations

- Develop an appropriate format and platform for Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights on the County webpage to expand families' access to critical information when facing homelessness.
- Promote Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights information as reasonable and appropriate to public school districts, county agencies, boards and commissions and to residents of Hamilton County.
- Schools should make the McKinney-Vento Act information easily available on their websites, including "what your rights are, what services we offer and who to contact."
- Schools should share the HCBOCC weblink annually with their families to amplify the community's awareness of services and rights of homeless students and their families.
- Work with HCBOCC to develop an appropriate format for Homelessness Resources & Know Your Rights infographic, and ask public school districts to review and offer input/edit as they see fit for the needs of their district.

- Explore the longer-term possibility of connecting community resources to create a one-stop service information resource for Hamilton County families who are struggling with or at risk of homelessness.
- Create a marketing campaign to amplify access to critical services, including PSAs, signs in school and out, and other ways of including the voices of students experiencing homelessness.
- Explore more effective ways to stay in contact with students beyond high school aged 18 to 25 as they transition into independence. They continue to need more robust positive reinforcement/mentoring/access to social services to help them establish a stable foundation into adulthood. Reach out to state and federal legislators who have expressed interest in this vulnerable population to determine what bills are currently working through the legislative process and/or what areas we might do further research and discuss further legislation that they may be interested in developing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hannah Boone Patricia Bruns Sylvia Maloney-Noyes Claire Mengel Abigail Murray Megan Rich Rina Saperstein

Safety Committee

Initiative: Empower Girls Who Have Experienced Gender-Based Violence

This initiative strives to connect with adolescent survivors of gender-based harassment and destignatize the psychological effects of violence, harassment, and bullying; to empower girls to speak up for themselves and others. The HCCWG proposes to do this by connecting girls with professional resources to educate, inform, and empower themselves and their peers so that they know their rights, the chain of reporting both in and out of school, and understand that they are not alone.

Research/Justification

Sexual harassment has long been an unfortunate part of the climate in middle and high schools in the United States According to the Office of Civil Rights' 2016 annual report, complaints involving sexual violence at the K-12 level increased 277% between 2011 and 2016, and complaints at the postsecondary level increased 831 percent. As of 2016, nearly half of the office's investigations for Title IX violations involve K-12 schools, and 47% of those are for sexual violence issues. Before the age of 14, 70% of American women face street harassment. As reported by the CDC, 57% of teens have friends who have experienced dating violence and 33% of teens in an abusive relationship do not tell anyone. Twenty three percent of all females report first experiencing partner violence before the age of 18. The interviews conducted by the Safety Committee found that each interviewee either experienced or knew someone who had experienced sexual harassment.

According to AAUWEF (Clinical Research Trials 2018) report on sexual harassment at school, the majority of incidents are made up of verbal sexual harassments (unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures), but physical sexual harassment seems to be also an issue at schools. This research has demonstrated that

adolescents are in a higher risk of becoming victims of sexual harassment, more often perpetrated by peers than by teachers or other adults. Girls experience sexual harassment more often than boys do, furthermore, girls tend to experience sexual harassment qualitatively more severe and subjectively more negative. In addition, sexual harassment at school may have lasting consequences for students' emotions and education, especially for girls, including decreased productivity and absenteeism from school. Moreover, girls report more psychosomatic symptoms and lower self-esteem levels than boys.

School administrators should be aware of how common a problem this is and how often this occurs across high school and middle school. While it is something that occurs frequently, there is often a gap in communication: Where do we go? Who can we talk to? Is this our fault? The HCCWG would like to see resources readily available so that people are not confused about what to do; educators and administrators talking freely about the issue to de-stigmatize it.

Recommendations

- Support the recommendation to the school districts that they implement free programs from appropriate community experts and providers to educate girls and educators on how to address gender-based harassment and assault
- Use the County social media to post once a month on the topic of gender-based harassment
- Annually revisit the social media campaign created by the Safety Subcommittee that lives on the County Instagram account

Respectfully Submitted,

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Deeya Prakash
Kathy Schwab
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Pay Equity Committee

Initiative: Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment

The Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment is a voluntary, employer-led initiative to help close the gender wage gap in Hamilton County. The Equal Pay Commitment will have a direct, positive impact on Hamilton County employers who choose to sign the pledge, their employees — particularly girls of working age, women and those who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender-nonconforming — and the community at large. Initially, signed commitments will be sought from employers representing six key industries: Education, healthcare, retail, banking, food service, and non-profits.

Research/Justification

This initiative is a continuation of the work conducted by the 2018 and 2019 Pay Equity Committees of the Commissions on Women and Girls. A key recommendation of the 2019 Pay Equity Committee was that the Commission on Women and Girls should develop and launch a Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge to help

local employers take proactive measures to address the systemic issue of pay inequity. After conducting additional research and interviews, the 2021 Pay Equity Committee developed the pledge and renamed it the Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment.

Pay inequities between men and women are well-documented, and recent research has drawn attention to deeper disparities that exist when factors such as race are taken into account. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had profound impacts on the gender and racial pay gap that may be felt for years to come. Now more than ever, women need equal pay for equal work.

How Big is the Gender Pay Gap?

On Equal Pay Day 2021 (March 24), PayScale, a compensation software, and data company, released new survey data that showed that for each \$1 earned by a white man:

- Asian-American women earned \$0.95
- White women earned \$0.82
- African and Black American women earned \$0.77
- Hispanic women earned \$0.76
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander women earned \$0.76
- American Indian and Alaskan Native women earned \$0.69¹

These numbers represent the uncontrolled gender pay gap (sometimes referred to as the "opportunity pay gap"), which looks at the median salary for all men and women regardless of job type or employment characteristics.

In Ohio, the pay gap between white men and white and Black women is even larger. For every \$1 earned by white men, white women earn 80 cents and Black women earn 66 cents, according to research compiled by the Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.²

Despite widely available data, many local employers have yet to take steps to address the gender pay gap. In an informal Pay Equity Committee survey of women who work for Hamilton County employers representing a range of industries, only 14% said they believed their employer had taken steps toward addressing gender and/or race-based pay inequities.

The Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on the U.S. economy and disproportionately impacted women and people of color — especially women of color.

While the unemployment rate for whites was 7.3% in 2020, it was 8.7% for Asian workers, 10.4% for Hispanic workers, and 11.4% for Black or African American workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These are more than double the rates observed in 2019, PayScale notes in "The State of the Gender Pay Gap in 2021."

"In almost every group, with the exception of Black or African American males, women have higher unemployment rates than men," the PayScale report states. "The pandemic has only exacerbated the pressures and expectations women face to take care of family and children, given the shift to at-home schooling."

And according to the "Analysis of Black Women's Historical Labor Trends & Systemic Barriers to Economic Mobility" report by the Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation: "Black women breadwinners are concentrated in the very occupations most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, both as essential workers such as health care aides and as employees in the jobs most affected by furloughs and job loss, such as retail and food service." 5

The Impacts of Pay Inequity Over Time

The impact of the gender pay gap is far greater than a single paycheck. Over the course of a 40-year career, the lost income can add up to over \$500,000 for white women and upwards of \$1 million for women of color, according to the National Women's Law Center.⁶

The pay gap impacts not just working women themselves, but also their families. In a report on the gender pay gap, the Lean In Foundation explains: "Mothers are breadwinners in half of U.S. households—meaning their families depend on their paycheck. When moms are paid less, they have less money for basic family necessities like rent, groceries, and school supplies. Over time, this impacts families' ability to invest in savings, higher education, or property."

What Happens When We Close the Pay Gap?

Closing the pay gap doesn't just benefit women — it also benefits the entire economy. If women were paid fairly, the poverty rate could be cut in half, and an estimated \$512.6 billion could be ejected into the U.S. economy, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research.⁸

How the Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment Can Help

When we developed the Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment using the Columbus Commitment as a model, we wanted to ensure that we provided employers with specific next steps to help close gender- and racebased pay gaps. This was also a recurring theme in our survey of local working women. To that end, the Equal Pay Commitment outlines more than a dozen recommended actions, ranging from conducting regular pay audits to tracking promotion rates by gender and race.

We have also established the following goals to hold ourselves and employers accountable:

- 12-month goal: At least one employer from each of the six target industries (education, healthcare, retail, banking, food service, and non-profits) 1) signing and implementing the Equal Pay Commitment; 2) reviewing the organization's compensation structure; 3) completing an assessment to identify gender- and race-based disparities in pay.
- **18-month goal:** At least one employer from each of the six target industries reporting a specific action that they implemented that addresses pay inequity as outlined in the Equal Pay Commitment (e.g., increased the pay of women when a disparity was found).

The success of the Equal Pay Commitment - and progress toward closing the pay gap - also depends on the support of the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners as well as the next Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls and its paid staff.

Recommendations

- The Board of County Commissioners should sign the Hamilton County Equal Pay Commitment and encourage other employers in the county and vendors that work with the county to also sign the Commitment.
- Employers from each of six key industries headquartered or doing business in Hamilton County education, healthcare, retail, banking, food service, and non-profits should sign the Equal Pay Commitment and encourage peer organizations to also sign the Commitment.
- Continue pay equity research, provide employers with regular updates on best practices, and explore ways to educate working women and girls on pay equity and empower them with negotiation strategies.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Bishop Valarie Boykins Patricia Raube Keller Tina Macon Vanessa Y. White

Pay Equity Sources

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- ⁴ Ibid.
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The 2020 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls

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Thank You to Our Supporters

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