



A Seat at the Table

**2019 Report and
Recommendations
to the Board of County
Commissioners & Community**



The 2019 Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls

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Thank You

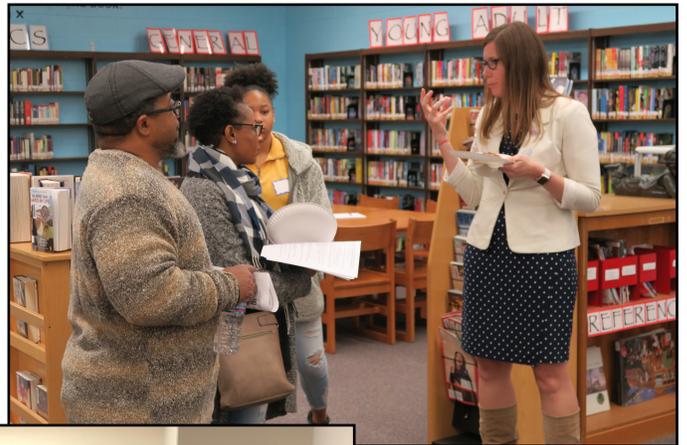
Many thanks to the following individuals and organizations that supported the 2019 Commission on Women & Girls.

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Girls' Health Period		

Thank you to Hamilton County Commissioners Denise Driehaus, Todd Portune and Stephanie Summerow-Dumas for your support of the Commission on Women & Girls.

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Executive Summary



We find ourselves at a moment in time for women in society. In the news, on social media, and even in the streets, women are making their voices heard, but real change only comes when women have a seat at the table. While women make up half of the population, they do not enjoy equal representation making decisions influencing their lives, careers, and well-being.

In our first year, we worked to address gender disparities and enact sustainable changes through recommendations with community partners, organizations, and local government entities. Now, we are building upon that momentum while developing new initiatives to empower, promote and protect women and girls in the county. In 2019, we focused on initiatives related to pay equity, housing insecurity, gender-based violence, and ending period poverty.

The commissioners conducted research and met with individuals, businesses, organizations, and elected officials in our community to learn more about their areas of focus and existing programs. Throughout the process, the members of the Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls identified resources and unmet needs and developed proposals to meet those needs

Evidence shows that addressing pay equity is good for business, employees, and the community. We examined solutions that support employers' needs while also moving the needle, and the development of a voluntary Pay Equity Pledge in Hamilton County would do both.

The impact of housing insecurity on the health and education on women and girls is a result of eviction issues and non-affordable housing. We convened our first discussion forum on this issue and are developing a toolkit for subsequent community-driven events.

Gender-based violence affects women and girls from all walks of life. We have a goal to inform the public of available resources, not only to combat violence but also to support survivors. We have asked Hamilton County to implement employee training programs, and have asked Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) to expand programs within the schools on this issue.

Period poverty impacts health, safety and self-esteem of women and girls, so we presented a request to CPS to pilot a program to increase access to menstrual supplies in their schools.

We also made tremendous strides creating continuity for future commissions. This foundational work will allow next year's commission to concentrate on partnerships and program development and implementation. We developed an advocacy policy and procedures to support issues, designed templates and generated procedures for promotion and press releases, created a new Commission application, and provided resources for research creation and collaboration. Our fundraising efforts also raised nearly \$3,000 to create materials and hold our Community Conversation event.

The Commission undertook a branding initiative that identified Commission attributes that we wished to represent visually and in voice. We will continue to work with the UC design program to execute the brand expression pieces.

In addition, the girls on the Commission were given opportunities to speak with civic leaders, discuss legislation, assist with the Day of the Girl and present to the CPS school board.

It is this advocacy work that makes us proud to be members of the Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls. We hope to connect agencies with the support that is already available in the community in order to make a larger impact. By focusing on dismantling barriers and improving the economic position of women and girls we hope to empower women and girls across the county to reach their highest potential.

We all do better when women and girls have a seat at the table.

History and Process

In 2017, Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus introduced a resolution to create Hamilton County's first Commission on Women & Girls. By a unanimous vote, the Board of County Commissioners established the Commission "to dismantle barriers that give rise to gender based inequities, to improve the economic position of all women in Hamilton County, to encourage the public recognition of the contributions of women to Hamilton County, and to develop and promote women in leadership positions throughout Hamilton County." The Board of County Commissioners gave the Commission on Women and Girls four objectives to fulfill that mission:

1. Making 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;
2. Facilitating partnerships between government, nonprofit, and business, which will support the mission of the Commission on Women and Girls;
3. Promoting and encouraging women to seek leadership positions in society, and helping girls to develop leadership skills; and
4. Developing public information and/or education campaigns to support the mission of the Commission on Women and Girls.



Recommendations

Recommendations to the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners

1. Hamilton County should establish and fund a part-time or full-time County staff position to manage and oversee the work of the Commission in order to fully develop these programs and convene a broad range of employers, community partners and other stakeholders. This initiative requires significant oversight, much more than a volunteer committee can provide.
2. Develop and launch the Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge built upon best practices, while remaining tailored to the needs of our local community as outlined in the report.
3. Continue to make appointments to boards and commissions that reflect those they serve; encourage other political jurisdictions to do the same, using The Women’s Fund’s best practices guide.
4. Enact policies and practices that support survivors of gender-based violence which include: Support a comprehensive workplace training and education program for all Hamilton County employees to prevent gender-based violence and promote a safe work environment; Adopt policies and procedures that give appropriate and reasonable accommodations to all Hamilton County employees who are victims of gender-based violence; and provide immediate assistance and support to Hamilton County employees who are victims of gender-based violence, such as information and referrals to resources.
5. Explore funding services to ensure that victims’ advocates are available 24-7 to be dispatched to scenes of domestic violence in partnership with local law enforcement, and identify funding for Hamilton County municipalities with higher rates of domestic violence that are not currently served by existing domestic violence emergency response teams.

Recommendations to the Community

6. Schools within Hamilton County should consider a system to provide free menstrual supplies to students in grades six and up within the upcoming school year.
7. Programs and legislation should continue to be enacted to achieve menstrual equity.
8. Encourage all schools within Hamilton County to expand gender-based violence prevention efforts.
9. Community conversations, storytelling and art can be used to open dialogue about solutions to housing insecurity and homelessness. Encourage continued conversations around the issue of housing insecurity hosted by community partners using the toolkit developed by the HCCWG.



Recommendations to the 2020 Commission on Women and Girls

10. Work with the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners to utilize tax incentive packages through the Hamilton County Development Corporation or County purchasing policies to incentivize businesses to adopt compensation policies that eliminate pay disparities.
11. Complete the Resource Hub for partner collaboration and volunteer resource referrals.
12. Reach out to school districts within Hamilton County to improve their gender-based violence prevention education programs through existing programs. We recommend leveraging resources such as the Hamilton County Educational Service group.
13. Support the expansion of programs available to train police to recognize signs of domestic violence and dispatch support teams to provide immediate assistance to survivors through this critical transition time.
14. Begin work to encourage all Hamilton County employers to give appropriate and reasonable accommodations to employees who are victims of gender-based violence and provide workplace training to prevent gender-based violence and promote a safe work environment.
15. Begin work to prevent housing discrimination against victims of domestic violence.
16. Begin work to ensure there is mandatory training for all county judges and magistrates on how to convict abusers and support victims.
17. Work with arts programs to develop storytelling, spoken word, games or short videos to communicate subject matter in nontraditional ways.
18. Schedule a time early in the year for commission members to participate in the St. Vincent de Paul poverty simulation activity to help commission members understand complexities and unseen costs involved in surviving in poverty.
19. Seek opportunities to engage legislators on commission initiatives.
20. Develop a fundraising campaign to provide financial resources for growth of HCCWG programs and supplies.
21. Work with the County to elevate the presence and exposure of the HCCWG and its initiatives in the community.
22. Continue to work with the University of Cincinnati on branding the HCCWG. It is critically important that the brand expression for the good work completed by the Commissioners is polished, provides a set of unifying attributes, including the logo graphic and a set of branding guidelines.
23. Continue to provide mentorship to the girls on the Commission.



Pay Equity Committee

Initiative: Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge

The Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge is a voluntary, employer-based commitment to understand the issue of pay equity, conduct an internal pay equity assessment and take proactive measures toward addressing disparities. This initiative is intended to increase employer awareness and support of pay equity while recognizing employers who demonstrate their commitment to this issue by signing the Pay Equity Pledge.

Who it Impacts

The Pay Equity Pledge will have a direct, positive impact on Hamilton County employers choosing to sign the pledge, their employees and the community at large.

Addressing pay equity is good for business. A recent PayScale, Inc. study analyzing how employees feel about pay practices, specifically pay fairness and transparency, found that these factors have a significant impact on worker satisfaction and retention rates.¹ These factors are 5.4 times more impactful on job satisfaction than worker wages relative to the market. Although not addressing pay equity directly, fairness and transparency are key pillars of pay equity practices.

Working toward pay equity can also have a major effect on the U.S. economy. According to an economic analysis of equal pay between 2014-2016 conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), if women had received complete pay equity, the U.S. economy would have produced additional income of \$512.6 billion (2.8% of 2016 GDP).² Projecting into the future, a recent McKinsey study showed that the U.S. could add up to \$4.3 trillion in annual GDP by 2025 if full gender equality were to be achieved.³

Finally, achieving gender wage parity would have a major impact on women living in poverty and their families. Wage inequality contributes to lower pay and family income, and an increased number of families living in poverty. According to the IWPR study, if working women were paid the same as similarly situated men, poverty rates for all working women would be cut in half, from 8% to 3.8%, and the number of children with working mothers living in poverty would be reduced from 5.6 million to 3.1 million.⁴

¹ Pay Fairness, Transparency Can Fuel Employee Engagement. *WorldatWork*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldatwork.org/docs/newsline/newsline-2017/11-november/nov-18/pay-fairness-transparency-can-fuel-employee-engagement.html>

² Milli, J., Huang, Y., Hartmann, H. and Hayes, J. The Impact of Equal Pay on Poverty and the Economy. *Institute for Women's Policy Research*. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/publications/impact-equal-pay-poverty-economy/>

³ Ellingrud, K., Madgavkar, A., Manyika, J., Woetzel, J., Riefberg, V., Krishnan, M. and Seoni, M. The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in the United States. *McKinsey Global Institute*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-the-united-states>

⁴ Milli, J., Huang, Y., Hartmann, H. and Hayes, J. The Impact of Equal Pay on Poverty and the Economy. *Institute for Women's Policy Research*. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/publications/impact-equal-pay-poverty-economy/>

Why the Initiative

This initiative is a continuation of the work conducted by the 2018 Commission on Women & Girls. The 2019 initiative creates an avenue for any employer, at any stage of the pay equity journey, to take proactive measures to address this systemic issue. By expanding the pool of employers and creating a tool to meet employers where they are, we can lift up and celebrate the move toward pay equity, while providing a system of accountability for employers who choose to adopt the pledge.

Research/Justification

The 2018 “A Seat at the Table” report highlights key data outlining pay inequities and the gender and racial wage and wealth gap, both locally and nationally. This report also demonstrates that many local individuals are hesitant to publicly address this issue. This supports the recommendation that increased awareness-raising is a critical step toward meaningfully addressing pay equity issues in Hamilton County.

To develop a framework for the Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge, we looked to our peer city of Columbus, Ohio, where in 2017 Mayor Ginther and the Columbus Women’s Commission launched the Columbus Commitment, a voluntary employer pay equity pledge. The Columbus Commitment has four simple requirements: the employer will (1) seek to **understand** the issue, (2) **analyze** their own objective data, (3) take **action** to address any disparities, and (4) **share** best practices and successes and attend an annual Best Practices event hosted by the Columbus Women’s Commission.⁵

The Columbus Commitment is managed by the Columbus Women’s Commission, which is led by a cabinet-level Executive Director and one additional staff position within the Mayor’s office. Once signing the pledge, employers self-direct their own pay equity measures and are not required to submit pay or employment data to the City. In addition to the Best Practices event, the Columbus Women’s Commission hosts lunch and learn events and publishes resources and links to its website. Since its launch, over 200 employers have signed on to the Columbus Commitment.⁶

We reviewed several other pay equity pledges and organizations working toward pay equity. Exact language and requirements of the pledges vary, but commonalities among them include that they are voluntary and involve employers conducting an internal analysis of their own policies and practices. Links to these pledges can be found in the appendix.

In addition to reviewing pay equity pledges, we also researched common actions among employers who have achieved or made a commitment to pay equity. One overarching theme of these employers is that there is a shared commitment and consensus among senior leadership.

The Pay Equity committee reviewed the employers who signed on to the Columbus Commitment to determine - to the extent possible – the local chapters of those same organizations. For instance, the Columbus



⁵ The Columbus Commitment: Achieving Pay Equity. Retrieved from: <https://www.columbus.gov/payequity/>

⁶ Interview with Shelly Beiting, Executive Director of the Columbus Women’s Commission. May 7, 2019.

chapter of the United Way was an early signatory to the Columbus Commitment. As a result, the Pay Equity team identified that the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, although not guaranteed, could be an early adopter of the local version of Pay Equity Pledge. Another example is several law firms with offices in both cities. By following this process, the Pay Equity team identified upwards of forty local companies that were in some fashion affiliated with the Columbus Commitment.

Next, key leaders of those organizations were identified and their contact information collected. Members of the Pay Equity team further sought to connect to those organizations and their leadership teams to assess attitudes about pay equity, and any current work that may exist at those respective institutions to address pay equity issues.

The Pay Equity committee then conducted a series of interviews following a standardized set of questions to collect responses uniformly. The interviews – collectively – represent a temperature read locally on the issue of pay equity as a whole. That assessment of the local environment is a key component to future work of constructing the Hamilton County version of a pay equity pledge, and perhaps more importantly, the manner in which it is to be introduced in the community and how support is to be built for and around it.

The key takeaways from the stakeholder interviews can be grouped in a few main ideas:

- Pay equity is a recognized topic, but most believe their compensation practices are driven by a fair, competitive marketplace and don't include gender bias. In that sense, pay equity is seen as a problem, just *not a problem – or not as big of a problem – at our organization* or in our industry. As noted earlier, the research doesn't support this notion; nonetheless, grappling with this prevailing attitude will no doubt influence how a Pay Equity pledge is adopted locally.
- Elements of the Columbus Commitment language are attractive to local companies particularly around its voluntary nature. Hence, a critical component will be that any effort introduced in Hamilton County would certainly need to be voluntary and employer-led.
- The vast majority of organizations interviewed would welcome a set of helpful practices and a chance to learn from other organizations, particularly in the same industry or of the same size, about how to approach addressing this issue.
- Similarly, leadership and championing of the pay equity issue or a local version of the Pay Equity Pledge by recognized, respected organizations (such as a local business chamber, Fortune 500 Company, etc.) - could inspire a domino effect for other organizations, elevate the issue, and overall provide a key endorsement of the effort.



Recommendations

- Hamilton County should establish and fund a part-time or full-time County staff position to manage and oversee the work of the Commission in order to fully develop these programs and convene a broad range of employers, community

partners and other stakeholders. This initiative requires significant oversight, much more than a volunteer committee can provide.

- Develop and launch the Hamilton County Pay Equity Pledge, which should build upon best practices identified by others, including the Columbus Women’s Commission, while remaining tailored to the needs of our local community as outlined in the report.
- Continue to develop relationships with local businesses and chambers of commerce and incorporate a broad range of stakeholders into the planning and execution of the pledge, including alumni members of the HCCWG. Consider identifying one or more leading employers to closely collaborate and provide feedback on the pledge and mentor other employers interested in addressing pay equity issues.
- Continue work on the 2018 Pay Equity Recommendations, which include a recommendation that the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners utilize tax incentive packages through the Hamilton County Development Corporation or County purchasing policies to incentivize businesses to adopt compensation policies that eliminate pay disparities. We did not further this issue in 2019, but recommend that a future Commissions continue to develop this initiative.

Respectfully Submitted,

Desiré Bennett
Katy Crossen
Holly Hankinson
Adrijana Kowatsch
Andrea Poling

Commonalities among companies who have achieved or committed to pay equity

Senior leadership commitment and consensus to approach

- Conduct regular pay audits and validate results with a consultant
- Be transparent with results, especially with those who are effected
- Define performance metrics and criteria
- Review offer process ... ban salary history questions, get starting pay right
- Consider each country’s unique position but have global standards
- Collaborate with other companies and learn from them

Balancing existing salaries is just the beginning

- Consider impact of total benefits package, beyond salary
- Evaluate succession planning to get women in leadership pipeline
- Ensure an inclusive workplace ... more women represented at top levels, involvement across the organization in women’s networks
- Confirm managers are on board ... important that both unconscious bias and the continuous evaluation of pay inequities is ongoing

Leadership Committee

Initiative: Resource Hub (searchable database) and Partner Summit

This resource hub (database) will serve as an aggregate of organizations working to create opportunities and provide support for women and girls. We want to amplify the work of these organizations and serve as a hub of resources for women and girls in Hamilton County. This will also benefit the commission as we become a hub of support for the work that is already being done in the community.

Why the Initiative

We recognize that many organizations are doing great work to advance opportunities and provide support for women and girls, however there is a general lack of awareness of the connections in the work. The resource hub and partner summit enable the commission to be an aggregator that allows these connections to happen.

Research/Justification

Both overlap and gaps exist in the work that supports women and girls so this is a way to drive synergies among the organizations. This will enable a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of women and girls in our community.

Recommendations

We are recommending that the commission develop a searchable online resource hub (database) that includes the organizations on the excel list.

Once the database has been developed and deployed we recommend that the commission host a partner summit to enable connections among organizations that support women and girls.



Respectfully Submitted,
Patty Raube-Keller
Anna MacLennan
Tina Macon
Heidy Lopez-Nolasco
Jackie O'Connell
Lesli Rice



Self-Identity and Health Committee

Initiative: To encourage a healthy sense of self through education and access to period products.

Young girls 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 young girls to feel empowered, safe, and confident about having their period.

Research/Justification

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 Key to Keeping Girls in School : <http://unicef.in/Story/122/Menstrual-Hygiene-Key-to-Keeping-Girls-in-School>)

The Self-Identity and Health Committee met with state Representatives Brigid Kelly and Catherine Ingram to discuss advocacy efforts related to the repeal of the Pink Tax in Ohio, and also presented on the issue of ending period poverty to the Cincinnati Public Schools Student Achievement Committee on October 3, 2019. Members of the Commission offered research and personal stories regarding period poverty during the presentation. The Commission requested that CPS pilot a program during the 2020-2021 school year offering free period supplies in schools serving grades 6 and up.

Recommendations

- Schools within Hamilton County should institute a system to provide free menstrual supplies to students in grades six and up.
- Programs and legislation should continue to be advocated for and enacted to achieve menstrual equity.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anne Bangert
Jenny Hu
Jenifer Moore
Kathy Schwab
Shoshi Stern
Jillian Teeters



Safety Committee

Initiative: Increase awareness and resources to both prevent gender-based violence and to better support survivors of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is an umbrella term to include domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc. The issue of gender-based violence affects women and girls of all walks of life.

Research/Justification

We have identified three key groups in which to dedicate our current efforts: students, Hamilton County employees, domestic violence survivors.

1) Prevention Among Students

Sadly, many girls are affected by gender-based violence. 57% of teens have friends who have experienced dating violence and 33% of teens in an abusive relationship do not tell anyone.⁷ 23% of all females report first experiencing partner violence before the age of 18.⁸

Gender-based violence is an issue of educational equity for girls. It impacts attendance and performance during critical education years. By reaching students of all genders at a younger age, we hope to prevent future instances of gender-based violence as well as support victims.

On October 3, 2019, we recommended to CPS' Student Achievement Committee that they expand their use of existing prevention education programs available through Women Helping Women and YWCA, specifically the Coaching Boys Into Men and Safe Dates programs. We asked the school board to identify two additional high schools to host one or both of these programs in the 2020-2021 school year, and it was added as an action item. These programs address the issues of toxic masculinity at the youth level and educate students on signs of abuse so that they can take care of themselves as well as their friends.

2) Hamilton County Employees

Protecting and accommodating victims of gender-based violence is a workplace equity issue. Unfortunately, 60% of intimate partner violence victims report losing their jobs after the incident and 25% of rape survivors report losing their jobs within one year of the assault.⁹

We can't equip survivors to make a change if they fear losing their jobs. Losing income could cause a woman to return to an unsafe environment. According to Futures Without Violence's "Workplaces Respond" program, survivors report economic



⁷ YWCA

⁸ Center for Disease Control

⁹ Futures Without Violence / Workplaces Respond.

insecurity as a reason for staying in an abusive relationship. And economic insecurity can factor in with all socioeconomic levels. Fear of harm to public or professional image of the survivor or the abuser. Public facing professionals may avoid safety planning that will be public record, such as calling the police, protection orders, criminal and domestic court.

The State of Ohio and the City of Cincinnati both have workplace policies to provide reasonable accommodations for victims of domestic violence who are either State or City employees. It is vital to the interests of Hamilton County that all county employees receive the support and services they need, including access to appropriate resources dedicated to gender-based violence survivors as well as to the prevention of gender-based violence.

3) Domestic Violence Survivors

Domestic violence is a serious crime against society with victims from all social and economic backgrounds. For example, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experience intimate partner violence.¹⁰

Unfortunately, many victims don't have the resources they need to attain medical/psychological care, safe housing, or legal support and they don't seek help because they feel deep and misplaced shame and stigma because of their abusers choices.

Within the county, there are only a few programs available to train police to recognize signs of domestic violence and dispatch support teams to provide immediate assistance to survivors through this critical transition time. These teams go to the victims, rather than requiring the victim come to them and, as such, are able to support more victims and have a bigger impact. These efforts help break the cycle of repeated violence and help reduce the domestic violence homicide rate.

There are other high domestic violence crime rate areas in Hamilton County that are not currently served by these onsite domestic violence victims advocates so we are asking the county to explore funding services to:

- 1) Ensure that victims' advocates are available 24-7 to be dispatched to scenes of domestic violence at the request of local law enforcement
- 2) Identify funding for Hamilton County municipalities with higher rates of domestic violence that are not currently served by existing domestic violence emergency response teams



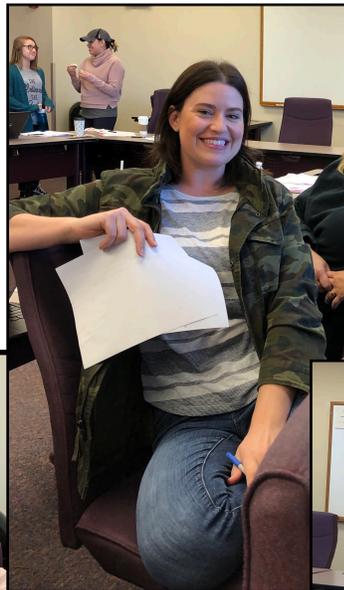
¹⁰ Center for Disease Control

Recommendations

- Support the expansion of programs available to train police to recognize signs of domestic violence and dispatch support teams to provide immediate assistance to survivors through this critical transition time.
- Begin work to encourage all county employers to give appropriate and reasonable accommodations employees who are victims of gender-based violence and provide workplace training to prevent gender-based violence and promote a safe work environment.
- The County Commission should encourage all schools within Hamilton County to expand gender-based violence prevention efforts.
- Enact policies and practices that support survivors of gender-based violence which include: Support a comprehensive workplace training and education program for all Hamilton County employees to prevent gender-based violence and promote a safe work environment; Adopt policies and procedures that give appropriate and reasonable accommodations to all Hamilton County employees who are victims of gender-based violence; Provide immediate assistance and support to Hamilton County employees who are victims of gender-based violence, such as information and referrals to resources.
- Explore funding services to: 1) Ensure that victims' advocates are available 24-7 to be dispatched to scenes of domestic violence at the request of local law enforcement 2) Identify funding for Hamilton County municipalities with higher rates of domestic violence that are not currently served by existing domestic violence emergency response teams.

Respectfully Submitted,

Eisha Armstrong
Mary Gaertner
Anne Megerle
Ava Surendorff
Mary Westrich



Social Mobility Committee

Initiative: Create community conversations around the impact of housing insecurity on women’s and girls’ health and education.

Who it Impacts

Approximately 44,500 households¹¹ in Hamilton County struggle to afford housing. They are “cost-burdened,” “severely cost-burdened,” or homeless. Their situations may range from living in cars or shelters or doubled up with other families, or, if they are paying rent, paying much more than they can afford, leaving them unable to pay for medicine, food, childcare, transportation, clothing or other family needs. The high cost of housing means that they have no savings, no assets and no cushion for illness, job loss, car trouble or other life events, and no extras for education or investment in the future.

Housing affordability, homelessness and eviction disproportionately affect women of color, women who are single parents, and young women emerging into adulthood. These renters are often working, but, at minimum wage or slightly higher, their wages have not kept pace with the increases in housing costs.

While a few families receive supports such as housing subsidies or public housing to help with rental costs, the majority of families do not receive this help because the amount of assistance is much smaller than the number of eligible families; for example, Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority has vouchers for approximately 11,600 families in Hamilton County with three to five year waitlists for eligible families. Even families who have access to housing vouchers or other assistance struggle to find landlords who accept assistance or who offer clean, accessible, affordable housing in safe neighborhoods near transit and jobs. Each year, about 12,000 evictions are filed, plunging unstable families further into crisis; many of these evicted households are single mothers.



While those who work in fields that serve struggling families – teachers, healthcare professionals, social workers and so on – may witness these realities and their subsequent impacts, the majority of the public remains unaware of the depth and complexity of the problem and its long-term effects on our community.



¹¹ Community Building Institute of Xavier University. (2017.) *Affordable Housing in Hamilton County: An analysis of households, housing affordability, and housing subsidy in Hamilton County and Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Why the Initiative

The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls exists to “improve the economic position of all women in Hamilton County”. Income instability, housing insecurity, homelessness and evictions deepen poverty for families and for individual women and children. Homelessness and housing insecurity adversely impact the health, education, opportunities, hope, and community and economic participation of women and girls in our community. While there are a number of proposed policy initiatives that can help, they lack community support because of misunderstandings, myths and stereotypes about homelessness. In addition many people feel hopeless or helpless in the face of this large-scale structural problem, so they avoid discussing it.

Some areas in the county outside the City of Cincinnati have similar levels of poverty and homelessness but less awareness and fewer public policy initiatives. As a Commission, we need to educate ourselves and the people we know, to see beyond the stereotypes, move out of passivity, and learn ways to engage our community at a deeper level through conversation and compassion.

In keeping with our directive to develop public information and/or education campaigns, this initiative attempts to use a community conversation model to help people understand our County’s housing problem and to empower county residents and their legislators to act toward solutions.

Research/Justification

The committee outlined the following components for social mobility in our region:

- a) Basic needs: food, clothing & shelter
- b) Economic capital: sustainability, living wage, etc.
- c) Skills & knowledge: for jobs, about other aspects of life
- d) Overcoming prejudice: intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, immigrant status, etc.
- e) Social capital: privilege, empowerment

Members of the committee engaged in research to learn more about the problems of housing and homelessness. This included attending workshops on housing and eviction offered by Affordable Housing Advocates; reviewing articles by Matt Desmond (“Evicted”); reviewing Xavier University and LISC studies on Hamilton County housing issues, participating in City Council’s Quality of Life Subcommittee, interviewing subject matter experts, and reviewing apps and online educational games about homelessness.



Recommendations

- We believe that community conversations, storytelling and art can be used to open dialog about solutions to housing insecurity and homelessness. This year, we developed and piloted a community conversation about homelessness and its effects on health and education for women and girls in a format that can encourage thoughtful discussion rather than passive listening. This pilot conversation should be the model for future house parties and discussions throughout the community. A template for community discussions is developed based on learnings from the pilot program.
- Engage arts programs to develop storytelling, spoken word, games or short videos to communicate this subject matter in nontraditional ways.
- Schedule a time early next year for commission members to participate in the St. Vincent de Paul poverty simulation activity to help commission members understand some of the complexities and unseen costs involved in surviving in poverty.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chandra Brown
Nia Jackson
Bess Lindeman
Megan Rich
Rina Saperstein
Eileen Trauth
Aalliyah Walker
Vanessa White

A Community Conversation on

The impact of Housing Insecurity on the Health & Education of Women & Girls

Thursday, November 14, 2019 | 6:30-8:00PM
Finneytown School District Media Center
8916 Fontainebleau Terrace, Cincinnati, 45231

Pizza, drinks, and babysitting will be available

The Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls is hosting this conversation to create greater awareness about housing insecurity and public will to address the issue.

This event is organized as a set of “table talks” in which small groups, each led by a facilitator, share experiences and perspectives. People experiencing housing insecurity, those in a position to witness its impact on women and girls, and all members of our Hamilton County community are invited to participate.

Results will inform recommendations made by the Social Mobility Committee to the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners.

RSVP Requested: <https://hccwg-housing.eventbrite.com>

More Info: Eileen Trauth (emtrauth@gmail.com), Rina Saperstein (rlsaperstein@yahoo.com), Commission on Women & Girls

INTRODUCTION: Denise Driehaus, President, Board of Hamilton County Commissioners

FACILITATORS:

- Kathy Schwab, Executive Director, Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Commission on Women & Girls
- Megan Rich, MD, UC Health, Family & Community Medicine; Commission on Women & Girls
- Rebeka Beach, Manager, Project Connect, Cincinnati Public Schools
- Cathy McNair, LISW-S, Finneytown District School Social Worker





**Support the Hamilton County
Commission on Women and Girls
by contributing to our work at:**

<https://www.gcfdn.org/Giving/Donate-Online>

**Select “Commission on Women and Girls”
in the dropdown box to direct your donation.**

Thank you!

**How will you make a
seat at the table?**