

**Governor’s Council on Women and Girls**  
**Full Council Meeting**  
Tuesday, October 11, 2022 | 3:00 PM  
Zoom Meeting

**MEETING MINUTES**

---

**I. Call to Order/Greetings and Opening Remarks**

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

**II. Report from Council Leadership**

a. Legislative Proposals Reminder and Update

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz reminds the council to consider any legislative submissions on issues that would be appropriate to address with the state legislature. Christine Jean-Louis will be in contact with the subcommittees for any ideas.

b. Introduction of New Council Member

The Division of Criminal Justice will now be involved with the Council on Women and Girls—they will join the Health & Safety and Leadership Subcommittees.

**III. Presentation: Period Poverty by Dignity Grows (Jessica Zachs and Jennifer Schwartzman) (see Attachment 1).**

The mission of Dignity Grows is to provide free menstrual and comprehensive hygiene products to neighbors in need in a manner that honors an individual’s dignity.

Dignity Grows’ mission is to empower women, girls, and all menstruators by removing obstacles to better self-esteem and health through the security and comfort of having personal and menstrual hygiene essentials every month that respects the dignity of every individual.

Period Poverty / Hygiene Inequity is a stigmatized issue. At the start of COVID, there were about 20 percent of girls impacted by period poverty—currently, the statistic has increased to 25 percent. The fastest growing rate of period poverty is on college campuses—over 33% of students cannot access period products during their time on campus. When there is a lack of access to menstrual hygiene necessities, it leads to missing school (which can add up to 145 school days missed) and work hours, compromising learning and wage-earning opportunities (see attachment).

Dignity Grows is a non-profit organization that started in Hartford, CT in March 2019. It evolved from a one-night project into a national movement addressing Period Poverty and hygiene inequity in its first 18 months. There are 50 chapters/affiliates nationwide and 8 chapters/affiliates in CT. These chapters provide support for communities, serving nearly all of the state while affiliates are smaller and serve a smaller demographic (see attachment).

All products distributed by Dignity Grows are given in discrete reusable totes. Over 22,000 hygiene totes are distributed throughout CT annually. Dignity Grows is the only national organization supporting the needs of the whole person, pairing comprehensive hygiene essentials with menstrual necessities.

85 percent of fundraising is grassroots—each Dignity Grows Tote (which includes a month’s supply of eight full-size hygiene products—soap, shampoo, deodorant, pantyliners, maxi pads, toothbrush, toothpaste, and hand-wipes) is made possible with a donation of \$10.00. All hygiene products are outside sourced and non-retail to avoid creating hygiene product deserts (which have become heightened due to the recent tampon shortage) which can redistribute period poverty within the community.

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz asked how Dignity Grows dovetails with the legislation that was passed in CT that seeks to address period poverty. J. Zachs responds that Dignity Grows aims to alleviate the period poverty felt by many individuals with the understanding that their organization alone cannot eliminate it. The Menstrual Equity Bill (HB-5272) helps women/girls who are at a location where the bill applies, but it does not accommodate the menstrual cycle. The Dignity Grows Tote is distributed so women/girls are prepared prior to the beginning of their period—this is a broader way to address the issue at hand.

The organization works through over 60 distribution partners (social service agencies) which provides Dignity Grows Totes among their populations (see attachment).

Dignity Grows strengthens and broadens the social service safety net of CT communities by connecting local service organizations and their resources (see attachment).

**IV. Presentation: Introduction to Roca’s Work (Sunindiya Bhalla) (see Attachment 2).**

Roca is an organization headquartered in Massachusetts and has been around for almost 30 years. It recently added a site in Hartford, CT. The organization works with youths and young adults ages 14 – 24. Their mission is to be a relentless force in disrupting incarceration, poverty, and racism by engaging the young adults, police, and systems at the center of urban violence in relationships to address trauma, find hope, and drive change (see attachment).

Roca works with young women/mothers who are untrusting victims of trauma and urban violence as well as adults in critical public systems that impact young women and mothers (see attachment). Annually, the organization works with about 300 young women who have a significant number of risk factors (see attachment).

The trauma experienced by Roca's Young Mothers puts them at greater risk for a myriad of risk factors and systemic challenges/barriers including poverty, violence, substance use/abuse, discrimination, young parenthood and housing instability. The majority of individuals experiencing trauma are repeating cycles of intergenerational trauma (see attachment).

Roca uses a long-term, high-touch, trauma-informed approach since the individuals being seen lack protection and requires a significant level of intervention (see attachment).

The organization's model is built around the understanding of adolescent brain development. Roca examines the impact of trauma on the brain, the cycles, patterns, and habits, and the process of change. Through their relationships and skill-building programming, Roca focuses on creating safety, identifying and disrupting unhelpful cycles, as well as planning for incremental change and relapse (see attachment).

Roca works with young mothers for four years (the first two years are more intensive). Their behavior-based intervention model spurs critical individual and systems change to support them (see attachment). On Roca sites, there are clinical mental health services, parenting courses, financial literacy classes, as well as GED program(s).

The organization is data-driven, examining both the immediate and long-term impacts. Roca retains between 88 and 94 percent of the young mothers in the program (see attachment).

From 1/1/2021 – 9/30/2022, the need and viability of having Roca in Hartford were considered prior to ultimately making the decision to the organization's expansion (see attachment). Roca has noticed it has been a challenging year in Hartford for youth violence. There are about 24 young mothers impacted by this (in terms of friends and/or family members being killed) as well as ten young women referred to the organization from non-fatal shooting victims and/or victims of street/gun violence. There has been a significant number of individuals impacted by trauma and sexual exploitation.

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz comments that having the opportunity to visit one of Roca's sites and witnessing the impact and hope the organization is providing to individuals was an incredible experience.

## **V. Subcommittee Reports**

### **a. Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity**

There is one report from the Office of Workforce Strategy. Anthony Barrett discusses Women’s Return to Work Economic Development Plan (*see Attachment 3*)—OWS is in the process of aligning their partners with their initiatives. The next step is to work across agencies to examine what is happening and assemble a comprehensive plan to reach all individuals across the state. OWS also wants to utilize the resources the State of CT currently has.

OWS will collaborate with key stakeholders to design and implement inclusive return to work programs. This involves identifying and aligning stakeholders within CoWaG at key agencies, performing a landscape analysis of existing resources and programs, designing a plan to augment existing programs (taking into account geographic and industry-specific needs), establishing implement and assistant programs in women’s return to work efforts with a special focus on marginalized groups, and identifying gaps in programming and pushing for additional legislative items to address these gaps (*see attachment*).

b. Health & Safety

Commissioner Manisha Juthani reported that it had been decided that for this particular time frame (starting this fall), the subcommittee will be focusing the meetings on the area broadly of reproductive and maternal health. The Health & Safety subcommittee has discussed abortion access moving forward as well as birthing deserts throughout the state and various interventions that can be taken. Going forward, looking at maternal health and mediations that can be taken to benefit the citizens of CT will be discussed.

c. Education & STEAM

Commissioner Sibongile Magubane reported that the 2023 Computing Challenge will be announced during Computer Science Education Week (12/5/2022 – 12/9/2022). The team is currently looking at a long-term sustainability plan (*see Attachment 4*).

d. Leadership

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz reported that during the September Subcommittee Meeting, the Office of the Treasurer reported on its work and the Leadership Subcommittee learned about the Thirty Percent Coalition’s plan to expand its mission to include senior leadership in its dedication to achieving equality in the boardroom.

The Northeast Investors’ Diversity Initiative updated the subcommittee—there are more companies making commitments to diversify without having to seek commitments through proxy ballots.

As of August 1, 2022, a NASDAQ Rule went into effect that requires disclosure of any company listed on NASDAQ that focuses on a specific board matrix that shows the breakdown of racial ethnicity and other identifying factors on a board.

Commissioner Michelle Gilman added that the subcommittee is focusing on the talents of women leaders in the state. Coming up on Friday (10/21/2022) there is a Women in Manufacturing Panel from 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM at Goodwin University.

**VI. Announcements**

a. Subcommittee Meeting Schedule

i. Women in Leadership Panels

1. **Women in Manufacturing-** Friday (10/21/2022) from 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM at Goodwin College (*see Attachment 5*).
2. **Women in Leadership** concerning state services post-COVID that positively impact women and girls - Tuesday (11/29/2022). Details are forthcoming.

ii. **Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity Subcommittee Meetings** will be held on Tuesday (11/15/2022) and Tuesday (12/08/2022) at 3:00 PM.

iii. **Education & STEAM Meetings** will be held on Tuesday (11/15/2022) and Tuesday (12/13/2022) at 3:00 PM.

iv. **Health and Safety Meetings** will be held on Monday (11/07/2022) and Monday (12/05/2022) at 10:00 AM.

v. **Leadership Meetings** will be held on Wednesday (11/16/2022) and Thursday (12/15/2022) at 3:00 PM.

b. Council Meeting Schedule for 2023 via In-Person, Zoom and Teams

- i. The next CoWaG full council meeting will be held on Tuesday (01/10/2022) at 3:00 PM.

**VII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03 PM.

Meeting Attendance Report

Office of the Lt. Governor	Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz (Chair) General Counsel Christine Jean-Louis
Office of the Governor	Jonathan Richter
Office of Policy and Management	Emily Burnett
Office of the State Comptroller	Assistant State Comptroller Tara Downes Danielle Palladino
Office of the Treasurer	Jennifer Putetti

Democratic House Representative	Dorinda Borer
Dept. Administrative Services	Commissioner Michelle Gilman
Department of Aging and Disability Services	Commissioner Amy Porter
Dept. of Banking	Commissioner Jorge Perez
Dept. of Children and Family	Valerie Lilley
Dept. of Consumer Protection	Commissioner Michelle Seagull
Dept. of Economic & Community Development	Deputy Commissioner Paul Robertson
Dept. of Housing	Deputy Commissioner Shante Hanks
Dept. of Labor	Commissioner Dante Bartolomeo Jean Rienzo
Department of Motor Vehicles	Commissioner Sibongile Magubane Janice Floyd
Dept. of Public Health	Commissioner Manisha Juthani
Dept. of Social Services	Commissioner Deidre Gifford Astread Ferron-Poole
Dept. of Veteran Affairs	Commissioner Thomas Saadi
Division of Criminal Justice	States Attorney Patrick Griffin Sharmese Wolcott Lisa D'Angelo
Office of Early Childhood	Commissioner Beth Bye
Office of Health Strategy	Acting Executive Director Kimberly Martone Abby Alter Mayda Capozzi
Office of Higher Education	Executive Director Tim Larson Noele Kidney
Office of Workforce Strategy	Kelli-Marie Vallieres Anthony Barrett Billy Huang Taylor Spurlock
Insurance Dept.	Commissioner Andrew N. Mais
Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors	Rosemary Lopez