

Governor’s Council on Women and Girls

Subcommittee on Leadership

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday June 30, 2026, at 3:00 PM

Virtual Meeting - TEAMS

I. Welcome & Opening Remarks

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz began the meeting by welcoming everyone. She introduced Tom Shepherd, President and Managing Director of Connecticut Retirement Readiness, and Jamelle Elliott, Founder of the Jamelle Elliott Collective, who would present on financial literacy and leadership. Lt. Governor Bysiewicz also introduced Zhara Wahidi, a student at Conard High School who participated in the discussion panel.

II. Presentation: ‘Financial Literacy: The ‘Primer’ For Strong Financial Health and Well Being’ – Thomas Shepherd

Thomas Shepherd started the presentation discussing the importance of financial literacy for creating good financial health and wellbeing. The Connecticut Retirement Readiness is an investment company that focuses on the retirement needs for Connecticut residents. They serve as an educational and advisory resource to help residents better understand complex financial issues to reduce financial stress and enhance retirement preparedness.

Connecticut Public Act 23-21, passed in 2023, requires all Connecticut public high school students to complete a half-credit personal financial management and financial literacy course. Thomas Shepherd introduced Zhara Wahidi, to discuss her experience with the financial literacy course offered at her high school. Although taking the financial literacy course offered insight and exposure to essential topics like budgeting and investing, she noted that the course did not consistently maintain student engagement long-term because of its focus on grades rather than building financial skills. She emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive application-based curriculum that can promote a stronger learning environment towards financial literacy.

Thomas Shepherd highlighted several areas the organization aims to improve. The average Connecticut household owes almost \$182,000 in consumer debt which includes mortgage debt. Connecticut also leads all states in average credit card debt at almost \$10,000. The average student loan debt is about \$37,000 with 518,500 Connecticut residents holding a total of \$19.1 billion. These statistics underscore the organization’s advocacy for expanding financial literacy education throughout Connecticut schools and improving the financial health of Connecticut residents.

Thomas Shepherd then introduced Jamelle Elliott. Previously, she worked as the assistant women’s basketball coach at the University of Connecticut. Her goal is to empower women to

become confident leaders through foundational life skill components. This includes helping young girls to lead themselves, communicate, build healthy relationships, overcome setbacks, make good decisions, develop confidence, and increase teamwork abilities. Developing strong leadership identities will help girls build healthy relationships, combat peer pressure, decrease recovery time towards setbacks, increase advocacy for themselves, and retain engagement in school. Elliott emphasizes that the grade level for leadership development should begin in the upper elementary grades, as girls are just beginning to form beliefs of who they are. Leadership development helps build confidence and leadership capacity in young girls. Jamelle Elliott highlights the Jamelle Elliott Collective that was created to help girls discover who they are. She also discusses her goal of creating a girls leadership academy that would offer opportunities such as Discovering Me, a program that starts at the 4th and 5th grade level and helps build confidence through character building, kindness, and belonging. As well as Discovering My Voice, a program specifically for grades 6-8, which assists with leadership, communication, decision making, and friendship building. The academy will also follow through high school grade levels to ensure young girls receive career readiness, advice on professionalism, goal setting activities, networking experiences, and civic leadership exposure.

III. Announcements

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz announced an upcoming panel, highlighting women in the corrections system within the state. It will be held on, August 24, 2026, at 1:00 PM at the Maloney Training Center in Cheshire, CT.

The next Leadership Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for September 22, 2026, at 3:00 PM and it will be held virtually. The last meeting for the year will be scheduled for December 8, 2026, at 3:00 PM.

IV. Adjournment

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz adjourned the meeting at 4:00 PM.