

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WOMEN & GIRLS



Full Council and
Subcommittee Summary
Year 2023

**Governor’s Council on Women & Girls
2023 Annual Summary Report**

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Purpose of Report:

This report is designed to discuss and summarize the meetings conducted by the Governor's Council on Women and Girls ("CoWaG") or ("Council"). This report will highlight topics discussed in full council and subcommittee meetings. The meetings aim to aid and bring light to issues women face in the state of Connecticut, with the CoWaG finding solutions for said issues.

The main topics discussed in 2023, revolve around legislative discussions, learning about community partnerships for expansion/growth, and refreshing the goals of CoWaG's initiatives.

Subcommittees were:

- ❖ Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity subcommittee
 - The purpose of this subcommittee is to identify financial barriers that disproportionately hinder women and girls, including (but not limited to) pay and work environment disparities that inhibit fair performance evaluation and advancement in the workplace.
- ❖ Education & STEAM subcommittee
 - The purpose of this subcommittee is to encourage educational advancement for women and girls, particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering, the arts and math.
- ❖ Health & Safety subcommittee
 - The purpose of this subcommittee is to identify health and safety issues that particularly impact women and girls and develop initiatives that support healthy lifestyles and offer physical, mental and emotional protection for women and girls affected by such matters.
- ❖ Leadership subcommittee
 - The purpose of this subcommittee is to promote women leadership in both the public and private sectors, particularly government elected and appointed officials, corporate boards and executive management, educational institutions, non-profit organizations and the media with the ultimate goal of achieving gender parity such that gender in workforce leadership proportionately represents the Connecticut population.

Summary of Full Council Meeting:

In 2023, the Full Council met on January 10, April 11, July 11, and October 17 (total four meetings). Those meetings consisted of special presentations, as well as a collection of reports from the subcommittees and what they had accomplished since prior meetings. For detailed information beyond the summaries below, please review the actual meeting minutes.

A. January 10, 2023 ([minutes](#))

To commence the meeting, the participants reviewed legislative proposals for the 2022 session. Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) highlighted its focus on regional sector partnerships, collaboration with the State Department of Education, and efforts to reduce employment barriers. The GWC emphasized the need for a robust committee and collaboration with the Department of Labor (for detailed information, refer to Attachment 1).

Special presentations enriched the session, including insights from the Health & Safety Subcommittee on Medicaid reimbursement for Certified Nurse Midwives and Doulas (refer to Attachment 2 and Attachment 3). Additionally, the FASFA Challenge Initiative was introduced, aiming to educate students about available funding sources (see Attachment 4). A presentation by Million Women Mentors outlined their goals to encourage female participation in STEM education and careers (see Attachment 5).

As the meeting concluded, announcements were made, including plans for a Hispanic Heritage celebration women leaders panel, the Women's Business Development Council's launch of a new round of funding in the Equity Match Grant program, and the initiation of the third annual Lt. Governor's Computing Challenge: Coding for Good. Notably, there were no Subcommittee updates or reports.

B. April 11, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Students Destiny Fontan and Janessa Pearson from Capital Prep Magnet School presented their social justice projects, focusing on health insurance in low-income communities and teacher retention in Hartford, respectively. Kid Governor Ellie Mendez discussed her mental health awareness platform, emphasizing the importance of addressing anxiety and depression among students. A cabinet member of the Kid Governor, Scarlet Beaulieu, highlighted her campaign against littering, organizing clean-up walks and creating a network for education. Sarina Kulsakdinun and Ying-Chu Chen from Students for Personal Finance Education addressed the need for mandatory personal finance education in Connecticut high schools.

Armored Artemises, a gender-minority robotics team, shared their experiences in the FIRST Robotics organization, aiming to bridge the gender gap in STEM fields. The team has won state

championships and focuses on community relationships. Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz expressed gratitude for the students' efforts and emphasized the importance of gender diversity in STEM.

Announcements included plans to centralize CoWaG recordings on YouTube, listing of upcoming events, and subcommittee meeting schedules.

C. July 11, 2020 ([minutes](#))

Opening remarks shared about the Council's legislative successes, emphasizing laws related to women's reproductive care, financial management, child mental health services, and social media protection. Lisa D'Angelo and Sharmese Walcott from the Division of Criminal Justice presented on their programs and initiatives. They highlighted the creation of the Office of Ethics and Professional Standards, which focuses on fair and equal administration of justice in Connecticut. They discussed their training programs, community engagement, and efforts to increase diversity within the State Attorney's Office. Erin Choquette, CEO of CT Paid Leave, provided an annual overview of the CT Paid Leave Act, emphasizing its benefits and fiscal soundness. The overview highlighted the number of applicants, approved benefits payments, and contributions to the trust fund. Choquette discussed outreach and improvements in the claims process, including a Document Dashboard for claimants. The Authority is working on a website redesign and plans to conduct audits of private plans. Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz discussed the availability of CoWaG annual report summaries from 2019 to 2022 and provided an overview of the Council's work and subcommittees. Subcommittee updates were given by Christine Jean-Louis on Health and Safety, Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity, and Education & STEAM. Dates for upcoming subcommittee meetings and the next full council meeting were announced.

D. October 17, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Opening remarks highlighted Breast Cancer Awareness month and Domestic Violence Awareness month. Events for Breast Cancer Awareness were announced, including waving the purple flag over the state capitol.

Sushmita Kirkland from Otis Elevator introduced herself and shared information about Otis's commitment to gender parity by 2030. The presentation covered Otis's focus on health and safety, environment and impact, people and communities, and governance and accountability. Otis is actively working on achieving gender parity with a plan through Paradigm for Parity. The commitment extends to disability inclusion, and a 6-point framework outlines specific actions for creating an inclusive workplace.

The Health & Safety Subcommittee, presented by Commissioner Beth Bye, focused on "Maternal Health: Family Bridge: Multi-Agency Collaboration," emphasizing population-level solutions,

reduced stigma for services, and an enhanced referral system. Impact statistics included a 30% reduction in mothers experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety and a 44% lower rate of Child Protective Services investigations. The Education and STEAM Subcommittee reported that the Internship Toolkit will be available online by the end of the year.

Council discussed Board and Commission Opportunities: Resumes can be submitted to Christine Jean-Louis. Upcoming Meetings for 2023 were noted.

Summary of Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity Subcommittee Meetings:

The purpose of this subcommittee is to identify financial barriers that disproportionately hinder women and girls, including (but not limited to) pay and work environment disparities that inhibit fair performance evaluation and advancement in the workplace.

This portion of the report summary summarizes the meeting minutes of the Economic Opportunity and Workforce Equity Subcommittee. In 2023, the Subcommittee met on February 7 (cancelled), May 16, August 15 and November 6 (cancelled) (total two meetings). For detailed information beyond the summaries below, please review the actual meeting minutes.

A. February 7, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

B. May 16, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Anthony Barrett and Billy Huang from the Office of Workforce Strategy presented the Women Return to Work Economic Development Plan. They focused on challenges during and pre-COVID, emphasizing access to healthcare and childcare. Women of color faced wage decreases, lack of employment opportunities, and unique challenges for women-led businesses. The presentation covered statistics, unemployment rates, and outlined the implementation plan within the Career Connect program. Initiatives like HAVENLY and partnerships with organizations supporting individuals with disabilities were highlighted. The YOU Campaign and various programs targeting diverse populations were introduced. Huang discussed future considerations, including inclusive employer practices, financial literacy counseling, and addressing the loss of benefits.

Erin Mercedes from The Women Business Development Council (WBDC) presented the Council's mission and initiatives. The focus was on supporting women entrepreneurs through virtual programming, grants, podcasts, and partnerships with the Office of Early Childhood. Key grants such as Equity Match Grant and Launchpad were highlighted.

Lacey Banks McGill of the Women Business Development Council elaborated on the mission of the Entrepreneurial and Women's Business Center. Services included technical assistance programs, tech lab initiatives, and support for social services and behavioral health field clients. The emphasis was on empowering women and people of color in entrepreneurship. Candace Freedenberg from Untapped Potential discussed the organization's role in supporting businesses and reigniting careers. They highlighted challenges faced by women, especially in terms of networks, confidence, and skills currency. Untapped Potential seeks to engage hidden talent, address the gap, and help women reintegrate into the workforce.

Technical difficulties were acknowledged, and future agenda items were briefly discussed. The July meeting will focus on women returning to the workforce and entrepreneurship, with potential legislative discussions in August.

C. August 15, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Untapped Potential reinitiated presentation from prior meeting. The presentation highlighted the previous meeting's theme on women returning to the workforce after the pandemic, emphasizing entrepreneurship and creative engagement with employers. Lifelong learning, especially in STEM and leadership roles, was emphasized, allowing women to network, rebuild resumes, and stay updated on skills. Untapped Potential supports women and primary caregiver men through free exploration, application, and launch steps. Participants benefit from peer support, mentorship, professional development, workplace tools, and online learning opportunities. There is a focus on reengaging about 35-45 active members each semester, seeks mentorship, event hosting, speakers, and company-branded event support.

Girls with Impact presented. Organization focuses on training Gen Z girls, providing a "mini MBA" to enhance talent and experience. In the last five years, 10,000 women underwent the program, gaining confidence, leadership skills, and hard and professional skills. Girls with Impact collaborates with a diverse group, offering an impact pathway and engaging coaches and mentors, including those from military and veteran backgrounds. The subcommittee discussed strategies to retain skilled women in Connecticut.

The planning for future agenda topics and legislative suggestions will be facilitated once summary reports are available by the end of the month, aiming for completion by November 6th for presentation to the Governor.

D. November 6, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

Summary of Education & STEAM Subcommittee Meetings:

The purpose of this subcommittee is to encourage educational advancement for women and girls, particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering, the arts and math.

This portion of the report summary summarizes the meeting minutes of the Education and STEAM Subcommittee. In 2023, the Subcommittee met on February 15, June 14, August 23, and November 16 (total four meetings). For detailed information beyond the summaries below, please review the actual meeting minutes.

A. February 15, 2023 (*minutes unavailable*)

Unable to provide summary notes (agenda missing).

B. June 14, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Christine Jean-Louis commenced the meeting, introducing new Co-Chairs, SDE Commissioner Charlene Russell Tucker, and Chief Manufacturing Officer Paul Lavoie. Subcommittee members introduced themselves and their roles.

Jennifer Michalek presented a debrief of the Lt. Governor's Computing Challenge. The challenge had 214 total submissions from 84 schools, partnering with CodeJoy to engage 2553 students. Data comparisons revealed increased female participation, but disparities in ethnic representation. The Recognition Event highlighted 33 submissions, recognizing 16 districts. Michalek discussed challenges, funding needs, and hopes for computer science, concluding by inviting questions.

Jean-Louis updated the Subcommittee on Million Women Mentors, with Colleen Bielitz as the new State Leader. Janice Floyd continues Internship Toolkit work, aiding employers in providing successful internships.

Susan Auchincloss from Sacred Heart University presented CS-Plan and Code.org initiatives. Programs included Federal Education Innovation Research Grant, Code.org Regional Partner, and a Pathway for Computer Science Cross Endorsement for Educators. Auchincloss discussed challenges and presented data on teacher interest and engagement in computer science. The presentation concluded with an emphasis on the commitment to equity. Jean-Louis thanked Auchincloss, announced upcoming Subcommittee meetings in August and November, expressing gratitude to attendees.

C. August 23, 2023 ([minutes](#))

The discussion began with presentation by Co-Chair, Paul LaVoie on goals of the Office of Manufacturing. He discussed the Office's efforts to bring jobs and manufacturing back to Connecticut. Utilizing Connex, a supply chain database, they aim to connect suppliers, shorten supply chains, and keep manufacturing local. The focus includes enhancing supply chain resilience with cybersecurity, exploring opportunities in renewable energy, such as the South Fork Wind project, and leveraging federal and state grants for digital transformation and leadership acceleration in manufacturing. The Office's mission is to maintain Connecticut's dominant position in manufacturing and transform major manufacturing hubs into tourist attractions. An upcoming event, Converge Connecticut, will support women in manufacturing.

Ideas included participating in STEM festivals, creating a table at the invention convention, engaging female students in informal talks to boost confidence in math and science abilities, inviting students to manufacturing facilities, and implementing a model circular for computer science, emphasizing project-based learning and teacher training. The Aspiration in Computing event welcomes female student submissions. The focus is on getting the toolkit up and planning an addendum of best practices. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 16.

D. November 16, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Million Women Mentor updated the subcommittee on expansion of ideas and initiatives for 2024 by the mentoring down and up committees. Also updated on Speak Out Sisterhood, Million Girl Moonshot, and other initiatives within the State. Discussion held on internship toolkit, which needs to be made accessible and ADA compliant. In the meantime, it is available online on the CoWaG website for use. Members of the Lt. Governor's Computing Challenge reported on the launch of a social campaign during CS Ed week and the Challenge Champion incentive for educations in alliance districts.

Members were encouraged to review the annual report summaries to review committee progress and determine next steps for 2024. In follow-up, members held a roundtable discussion on 2024 goals, which included pipeline work, MIF/First Robotics collaboration, promotion of the internship toolkit and reimagining conventional hiring practices. Next meeting is on Wednesday, February 14.

Summary of Health & Safety Subcommittee Meetings:

The purpose of this subcommittee is to identify health and safety issues that particularly impact women and girls and develop initiatives that support healthy lifestyles and offer physical, mental and emotional protection for women and girls affected by such matters.

This portion of the report summary summarizes the meeting minutes of the Health and Safety Subcommittee. In 2023, the Subcommittee met on March 6 (cancelled), June 12, September 5 (cancelled), and December 4 (cancelled) (total one meeting). For detailed information beyond the summaries below, please review the actual meeting minutes.

A. March 6, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

B. June 12, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Meeting focused on summarizing various agency programs and future directions.

Miriam Miller, Policy Director of the Department of Public Health (DPH), presented legislative updates. Key points included successful bills passage, emphasizing the Maternal Health bill's birth licensure category allowing birth centers. The bill aims to address black maternal and infant outcomes, introducing an infant mortality review committee and a DULA advisory committee for workforce development. Miller highlighted the Universal Home Visiting Program in collaboration with the Office of Early Childhood.

Director Gifford, introduced by Juthani, shared legislative highlights from House Bill 6669, focusing on healthcare affordability. Key aspects included a Drug Discount Card Program, prohibition of facility fees on certain routine services at hospitals, enhanced enforcement measures for Certificate of Need, and provisions against anti-competition, tiering, steering, and gag clauses.

Terra Volpe from Connecticut Against Gun Violence discussed the commission's vision for gun violence prevention and the crucial funding for this cause. Commissioner Ron Welch from the Department of Veterans Affairs was acknowledged, and the 75th year of the Women Military Integration Act was highlighted. Miller stressed the importance of Esthetician Licensing to Women's Health and Safety, addressing delays due to COVID-19. The addition of Music Therapy License was emphasized.

Commissioner Beth Bye provided updates from the Office of Early Childhood, summarizing the Budget Bill HB 6941. Key points included increased funding for Care4Kids, creation of a protective services category, fiscal year 25 enhancements for School Readiness and Child Day

Care, removal of Smart Start Program sunset date, support for Local Early Childhood Collaboratives, and increased human capital investment tax credit.

Juthani addressed the Universal Nurse Home Visiting program, indicating initial funding and collaborative efforts with OHS and DSS for sustainability. Plans include hiring an evaluator to share participation data and well-being outcomes. The meeting concluded with discussions on various topics enhancing health services and support programs.

C. September 5, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

D. December 4, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

Summary of Leadership Subcommittee Meetings:

The purpose of this subcommittee is to promote women leadership in both the public and private sectors, particularly government elected and appointed officials, corporate boards and executive management, educational institutions, non-profit organizations and the media with the ultimate goal of achieving gender parity such that gender in workforce leadership proportionately represents the Connecticut population.

This portion of the report summary summarizes the meeting minutes of the Leadership Subcommittee. In 2023, the Subcommittee met on March 22, June 21 (cancelled), September 20, and December 20 (total three meetings). For detailed information beyond the summaries below, please review the actual meeting minutes.

A. March 22, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Meeting featured a presentation by Margaret "Peg" Hackett from the Department of Administrative Services Learning and Development Team. Hackett discussed the Aspiring Leaders Program, a five-month initiative focusing on leadership skills, process improvement, and outcomes for the state. She also introduced LinkedIn Learning as a platform for soft skills and mandatory state training. The discussion covered program nominations, content ownership, and the potential use of LinkedIn Learning for various training purposes. The Leadership Committee reported on past and upcoming panels, including discussions on domestic violence, Black and Latino studies, maternal health, women in agriculture, women teaching computer science, and women firefighters. A public comment period addressed the Women's Bipartisan Caucus priorities, an environmental leaders' forum, and strategies to maximize panel exposure. The meeting concluded with reminders about the schedule and an invitation to a corporate panel on paradigm for parity on March 29th.

B. June 21, 2023 (cancelled)

No meeting minutes.

C. September 20, 2023 ([minutes](#))

The meeting focused on updates and presentations related to the Occupational Therapy and Training (OTT). The discussion highlighted collaboration with the 30% coalition, a diverse group of investors managing over \$48 trillion in assets, aiming to enhance gender and racial diversity on public and private company boards. Plans were outlined for a campaign relaunch in November to strive for 50% or parity in companies. The Northeast Investors Diversity Initiative, targeting companies in the Northeast, was introduced. The meeting touched on shareholder proposals, emphasizing the ongoing focus on board diversity, NASDAQ rule examination, affirmative action

implications, and efforts towards overall gender parity based on census data. Leadership Committee work groups reported no updates, and other topics included the October 17 Full Council Meeting, the 2023 meeting schedule, and an upcoming panel discussion moderated by Lt. Governor Bysiewicz on October 2 with Paradigm for Parity, addressing ways corporations can promote equity in their female workforce.

D. December 20, 2023 ([minutes](#))

Meeting focused on presentation by CT State Community College Women's Leadership Institute, which focuses on enriching women with leadership skills and self-esteem over a 12-week period thru workshops and classes. Program is free for women in community college. See meeting attachment for presentation details.

Members provided updates: OAG commenced its first employee resource group, introduction made of new DCF Commissioner, and OPM has been collaborating with DAS and CHRO to streamline process for EEO and CHRO officers.