

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

**in Collaboration with
Boston Women's Commission,
Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women,
Somerville Commission for Women, and
The Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston**

Boston Public Hearing on Girls' Issues

REPORT

*On Thursday, March 15, 2001,
the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
held its first public hearing for girls
at Roxbury Community College in Roxbury, Massachusetts.
It was the fifth hearing in an ongoing series of public hearings.*

*The purpose of this hearing was to listen to the concerns of
young women and girls in the Greater Boston area.*

*The Commission hopes that the comments, feedback, and input of the
Participants will help us address some of the most pressing
concerns facing young women and girls in our state.*

Attendees

Commissioners

Susana Segat, Chair
Barbara Gomes-Beach
Donna Finneran
Elaine Guiney
Mary Reardon Johnson
Angela Menino
Jo Anne Thompson

Elected Official

Dorothy A. Kelly Gay, Mayor, City of Somerville

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Priscilla Golding
Melixza Gonzalez
Pam Mutascio
Cecilia Blaine
Frances Jarvis

Boston Women's Commission

Marie Turley
Patricia Nickerson

Somerville Commission for Women

Christie Mase

The Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston

Kathryn Wheeler

Participants from the Community

Victoria Alzapedi, Title IX Advocacy Project
Janaya Brown, Girls Inc. of Lynn
Tess Brown, Mass Action for Women Audit
Carla Campbell, G-Row Boston
Winona Campbell, Parent
Andrea Carney, Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Services (GLASS)
Jewel Cash
Jewel Cash, Sr., Boston Neighborhood Network
Eunice Charles, Malden YWCA
Christine Dennison, Hyde Park Community Center
Marilyn Evariste, Teen Voices
Mery Faial, Alianza Hispana
Eric Green, Youth Voice Collaborative

Ashley Guadalupe, Boston Hosing Authority
Claudine Guerrier, AIDS Action
Janice Guild, Wellesley Police
Heidi Hansberry, Wellesley Students Against Destructive Decisions
Janet Harvey, Junior League
Veronique Ibobokiwe, Divie Ministries
Trina Jackson, STAR Program at Casa Myrna Vazquez
Karl-Lydie Jean-Baptiste, Youth Voice Collaborative
Jaynele Jean-Pierre, Dorchester House Teamwork Program
Tominika Johnson, Boston Housing Authority
Valerie Johnson, The Ella J. Baker House
Suzi Kim, Youth Voice Collaborative
Bobbi Legal, Girls Inc., of Lynn
Juliane Liberus, Cambridge Sister's Program
Tahnee Marmanillo, Title IX advocacy Project
Latasha Martin, Malden YWA
Miriam Messinger, The City School
Meleni Mhlaba, Adolescent Wellness Program, Boston Public Health Commission
Kimberly Mosby, Teen Voices
Hiladia Nueta-Rendon, EDC
Haimonot Neguse, Youth Voice Collaborative
Rubia Reyes, Latino Health Institute
Laura Rice, Big Sister Association of Greater Boston
Laurie Robinson, Office on Women's Health, NECON Task Force
Tracey Rogers, Fenway Community Health
Shiphrah Rosenberg, Hyde Park Community Center
Liz Salomon, Fenway Community Health
Emily Salway, Wellesley Students Against Destructive Decisions
Kenyatta Saunders, Teens Networking Teens, RMSC
Jessica Schoengold, Patriots' Trail Girls Scouts Council
Mary Smoyer, Boston Women's Heritage Trail
Deborah Weaver, Girls Leap Self-Defense

Opening Remarks

Introduction by Marie Turley, Executive Director

Boston Women's Commission

Ms. Turley began by thanking the audience for coming to the hearing. She recognized and acknowledged the organizers from the Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston, the Women's Commissions of Boston, Cambridge and Somerville, as well as the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. She also introduced Commissioner Menino.

Welcome by Commissioner Angela Menino

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Commissioner Menino officially welcomed everyone on behalf of herself and Mayor Thomas M. Menino. She also recognized the Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston and the Women's Commissions of Boston, Cambridge and Somerville and thanked them for collaborating with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women in organizing the hearing. Commissioner Menino explained that a report would be compiled and distributed to the Commission's appointing authorities. She recognized that adults, as well intentioned as they can be, are often out of touch with the issues facing young women and girls. On a personal note, she stated that she and her husband have four granddaughters and they realize the difficulties they may face, as they get older.

Commissioner Susana Segat, Chair

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Commissioner Segat explained what the Commission on the Status of Women is and how it functions. Ms. Segat talked about the mission of the Commission and how it recognizes the importance of this hearing: to listen to and support girls and young women. She explained that the information gathered at the hearing would be used in Commission work, which includes compiling a report from written and taped testimony. The report will be distributed to the Commission's appointing authorities: the Governor, the Senate President, Speaker of the House and the Caucus of Women Legislators. She also explained the ground rules of the hearing and introduced the Commissioners in attendance.

Summary of Testimony

Summaries are based on note takers' notes from the meeting, staff listening to the audiocassette recording of the testimony and written testimony.

Julia Perez

Ms. Perez represented herself. She talked about a young Lebanese woman that she met three days earlier who inspired her. This young woman was exceptional in that she pursued a career in a sport traditionally not welcoming to women --- wrestling. As a senior at Harvard, she had attempted to start a girl's wrestling team at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School as well as doing outreach to low-income minority girls. She stated that young women need to be supported in endeavors such as this and she feels that any young person willing to push the limits in this way deserves support.

Andrea Carney***Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services***

Ms. Carney is 18 years old. She related a story of when she was 15 years old when she stopped eating for three months. At that point in her life, she was depressed and did not have many friends to lean on. Her desire to be loved and accepted at all costs led to her to lose 26 pounds when she was already quite thin. She managed to get through a very scary time. She told everyone that no matter what you looked like you would be loved; you do not have to stop eating or exercise constantly to be loved. Ms. Carney also noted that if you see someone dieting like that, they are not doing it to be pretty, they are doing it so that they can have some kind of control.

Tracey Rogers***Fenway Community Health Center***

Ms. Rogers is a psychologist and researcher at Fenway Community Health Center in Boston. The mission of FCHC is to enhance the physical and mental health of the community, which includes the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities. She talked about a survey done of 230 women served by the mental health department covering the last three years. All were sexual minorities: lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. The survey revealed that 24% knew they were gay before the age of 12; another 24% knew between the ages of 12 - 18. That means that about 50% of the women interviewed were aware of being different, sexually, as girls. Ms. Rogers noted that years later, these same women are dealing with coming out issues mainly because their needs, at the time, were being ignored, rejected or denied. She concluded by saying, "Providers and educators must get educated about sexual orientation and about accepting difference and reducing stigma." *Written testimony on file.*

Liz Salomon***Fenway Community Health Center***

Ms. Salomon is a researcher and educator at Fenway Community Health Center. She has experience as a group facilitator for gay and questioning youth here in the Commonwealth, as well as Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Washington. She stated that there is too much silence in discussing the lives of young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. Lacking a forum for safe exploration, she states many youth struggle silently with these issues. They may be acting out at home or at school, overcompensating by fitting into the classic model of overachiever, engaging in risky sexual activity or self-mutilation, depression, and suicidal tendencies. All young people dealing with these issues need a supportive and safe place to go where they can feel validated and have their stories heard. *Written testimony on file.*

Shiphrah Rosenberg***Hyde Park Community Center***

Miss Rosenberg is eleven. She believes that the biggest problem concerning teenage girls today is self-confidence and body image. She noted, "One out of every five college students has an eating disorder" and further noted that many young women and girls think they are not thin or pretty enough. Most girls feel that "Barbie" is the perfect woman. Miss Rosenberg feels that Barbie dolls are not realistic and that most girls cannot live up to a perfect image that is just not real. She thinks that teens try very hard to be someone they are not, to impress their friends or

boyfriends. She stated that it is her mother who has tried to help her be herself and not try to be anyone else. *Written testimony on file.*

Christine Dennison

Hyde Park Community Center

Ms. Dennison is the Girls Program Coordinator at the Hyde Park Community Center. For the last few years she has worked exclusively with girls in Boston, first at a DSS residential facility, then at a female DYS detention unit and for Boston Community Centers. She has also been a big sister and a mentor through Roxbury Youthworks, Incorporated. She believes that adequate after-school and mentoring programs are crucial for girls' development and through these programs, many of the pressing issues facing girls in the 21st century could be addressed. Ms. Dennison believes that it is critical that adolescent girls have positive female role models. Girls need caring adults that listen and respect them. A mentor would help young girls gain access to services without the involvement of parents; this is crucial particularly around issues of their sexuality, which girls are often scared to talk about with parents. Just as it has in her own life, Ms. Dennison believes that after school programs can make significant difference in shaping a girl's world. It was her own experience in an after-school program that helped her decide to help other young women and girls. *Written testimony on file.*

Carla Campbell

G-Row Boston

Ms. Campbell is a member of G-Row Boston. She spoke about the need for after school programs for girls, especially sports. She stated that, "There is no written rule that says a girl can't join her school's hockey, football or even wrestling team." Very often however, media images, facial expressions, and male-accommodated equipment can make girls feel unwelcome. She is one of several diverse females that make up the first rowing team in a Boston Public School. Ms. Campbell talked about how the team is a pioneer in a predominately white, male sport and how the women's rowing team at Yale University in the 1970's fought for equal rights. She noted that the team faces hardship in that they had very little funding and they had to borrow a boat. They are non-profit and not yet funded by the Boston Public Schools. Ms. Campbell also told of how little recognition they get as athletes within the schools. Due to the support that they receive from one another, they believe that they create social change through rowing. *Written testimony on file.*

Laura Rice

Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

Ms. Rice is the Director of Programs at the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston. Their mission is to help girls realize their full potential by providing them with positive mentoring relationships with women. Ms. Rice testified that research revealed that by age 11, a young girl's sense of satisfaction with herself, including how she looks and what she is capable of, starts to decline. Only 20% of girls reach age 18 with a positive sense of self. Ms. Rice brought up four issues of concern: gender equity for girls, female stereotyping, leadership development, and mentoring. Girls need to have the same opportunities available to them as boys. Also, females are stereotyped and girls see this through various media outlets. This stereotyping, "places limits on their [girls'] abilities to have confidence in themselves and to be successful and safe in the world." She also noted that leadership development and mentoring relationships with caring

adults could improve a girl's attitude and help develop a stronger sense of self. Ms. Rice mentioned a 1995 study that indicated that girls with a big sister or mentor were, "46% less likely than the peers to start using drugs, 27% less likely than their peers to start drinking alcohol, 52% less likely than their peers to skip school." *Written testimony on file.*

Juliane Liberus

Cambridge Sister's Program

Miss Liberus is 14 years old and attends the Fitzgerald School in Cambridge. She came to the hearing with the Cambridge Sister's Program. She discussed the program and how it reaches out to girls age 9 - 14. It provides a safe place for all Cambridge girls to express themselves and learn from each other. Miss Liberus is a member of the group's Leadership Program, which is for seventh and eighth graders. They meet weekly to work on developing and strengthening leadership skills. She testified that one concern for her and other girls of this generation is the role the media plays in shaping their lives. She feels that the media creates a certain look and anyone who does not meet its standards is excluded from the so-called popular group and made fun of. Miss Liberus testified that girls need to be appreciated for their interest in sports, not pushed away or discouraged. She mentioned that boys are treated differently than girls in the classroom. Boys get special privileges that girls do not, like leaving class early for special events. She feels that we need more programs that are geared towards girls, helping them to overcome obstacles. *Written testimony on file.*

Deborah Weaver

Girls LEAP Self-Defense

Ms. Weaver is here with Girls LEAP (Lifetime Empowerment and Awareness Program) Self-Defense. This is a self-defense and empowerment group taught by women for girls. It started as a result of Cambridge residents raising concerns about sexual assault in neighborhoods, sexual harassment in schools, and what was happening to their daughters. Originally the group went to Cambridge Police to see what programs they had. Cambridge Police gave the group a small amount of money to start their own program. They now work with girls in Somerville, Boston, Cambridge, and Allston. Ms. Weaver testified that they wanted a program that would "celebrate the powers of girls" and would "give them a chance to practice life skills and give them support from young women who are from all the various kinds of backgrounds that these girls are from." She noted that they are now working on a long-term program with girls called Alliance for Safe Girls Initiative. This would allow girls to network with other resources. She also relayed a story from her experience as a faculty member at Wellesley College. She met a young woman ten years ago who had commented on her self-defense work. The woman said she had been glad to see it on campus but that she had already been sexually assaulted before going to college. She had asked Ms. Weaver what she was going to do for girls; this had a lasting effect on her.

Claudine Guerrier

AIDS Action Committee

Ms. Guerrier is from AIDS Action Committee and is a bilingual case manager. She would like to see more social workers hired in all public schools. She testified that as an HIV case manager, she is limited to only discussing HIV. She sees so many cases of young women and girls with HIV. She suggests that lack of mentoring is the problem. Social workers with diversity experience in the schools might help.

Veronique Ibobokiwe

Divine Ministries

Ms. Ibobokiwe stated that she is a tireless advocate for the poor, the needy, and for mothers on welfare. She feels that we must all serve people to lift them up. She states that we “dare not play politics on behalf of our own children.” She stated labors “in the interest of humanity and because it is the right thing to do.” She believes that we our sacrificing our future in the name of our own job and bread and butter.

Mery Faial

Alianza Hispana

Ms. Faial is the Program Manager for Alianza Hispana’s youth department. She testified on the after-school tutoring program that they provide. It consists of an outreach worker who works with girls on issues of self-esteem and achievement. She discussed the need for support of these programs, especially for Latino and African-American young women, who are often at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. *Written testimony on file.*

Victoria Alzapedi

Title IX Advocacy Program

Ms. Alzapedi is an attorney and the founder and Executive Director of the Title IX Advocacy Project in Boston. Title IX is the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in schools that receive any money from the federal government, including all public and most private schools in Massachusetts. Their mission is to also focus on Chapter 622, a state law that deals with discrimination in schools. Ms. Alzapedi testified that even though these laws have existed for years, many girls still face lack of opportunity and inequity in school. She stated that, “some of the issues we focus on at the project are sexual harassment, discrimination in school-based sports programs, and pregnancy discrimination.”

Tawnee Marmanillo

Title IX Advocacy Program

Miss Marmanillo is 16 years old and a Junior at O’Bryant High School. She is a peer leader for a project dealing specifically in sexual harassment prevention. She testified that girls face various types of sexual harassment daily. She mentioned inappropriate touching, comments and looks, anti-gay comments and in extreme cases, sexual assault or rape. She feels that these serious problems cause girls to lose self-esteem and become depressed, which could lead to suicide. She believes that students need to know that someone is there to help them and that the school will take steps to make sure that these problems do not occur. Miss Marmanillo added that gender discrimination laws should be enforced in each school.

Eunice Charles

YWCA of Malden

Ms. Charles is part of the YWCA of Malden’s Girls in Action Program. The girls participating range in age from 13 - 17 years old. Ms. Charles believes that this age group is especially vulnerable to the pressures young girls’ face. She stated that, “we are no longer children yet we are not yet adults.” That makes the pressures on them regarding STD’s, drugs, alcohol, and substance abuse a very real fact of life. She also stated that it was difficult to find someone to talk to and ask for help. As a member of the YWCA of Malden, however, she feels at home.

They embrace diversity in people and personality. The young people are taught about substance and tobacco abuse and AIDS; some of the young people work there, as well. Ms. Charles believes that working at the YWCA prepares them for the real world. She also stated that she had been a member for the past two and a half years and intends to stay for three more years.

Written testimony on file.

Latasha Martin
YWCA of Malden

Ms. Martin represents the YWCA of Malden. She stressed that young people have many pressures on their minds. Having the YWCA is a great experience for all young girls. She stated that it gives girls a safe place to go in an environment that provides them with a wide variety of choices. Ms. Martin stressed that it is very important to be around girls their own age and get an opportunity to earn money. For her, the YWCA is a place that teaches young girls morals and leadership skills and she feels this is important for all girls. *Written testimony on file.*

Tominika Johnson and Ashley Guadalupe
BHA Community Service Department

Ms. Johnson and Ms. Guadalupe represent the Boston Housing Authority's Community Service Department. Ms. Johnson testified on the seriousness of violence against women and girls, how it damages their self-esteem. She feels that there needs to be more programs to address this issue. She also gave an example of a friend, a young woman, who was seeing a young man who took care of her materially but was constantly abusive to her. This put a strain on her friendship with this young woman. Ms. Johnson stated that violence on TV and in movies, even if fake, affects us all negatively. She believes that girls do not deserve to be abused because they are girls, that it is foolish to think that girls are powerless. She stated, "Everyone has the same amount of power in them. You just have to use your mind."

Ms. Guadalupe testified that abuse against girls and women not only effects them physically but emotionally as well. She noted that low self-esteem leads to other problems. She would like to see after-school programs and support groups to help girls get out of abusive relationships. Girls need to understand how young men sometimes use presents and gifts as a means of control, which leads to bigger problems.

Jaynele Jean-Pierre
Dorchester House Teamwork Program

Miss Jean-Pierre is 17 years old and represents the Dorchester House Teamwork Program. The ages of girls participating are 12 - 17 years old. She testified that they discuss issues like drug abuse and teen pregnancy. She noted that since being involved with the program, she has become more responsible and confident. Modelmaking is one aspect of the program that allows the girls to learn self-defense. Miss Jean-Pierre believes teen pregnancy to be a crucial issue facing girls. She attends school with several young mothers who do not know what they are going to do with their lives. More programs to assist them emotionally would help.

Laurie Robinson

Office on Women's Health

Ms. Robinson is the Chairperson on the Women's Task Force on NECON (New England Coalition on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.) In 1998, the task force took a report to the New England Governor's Conference and she testified on that report. She believes that women's health has been reduced to individual body parts rather than a comprehensive lifespan approach. Thus, young women's health has been reduced to primarily reproductive care and whether or not they get pregnancy prevention education. Ms. Robinson testified that a young woman's whole body, personality, and mental health have been ignored. Here are some statistics from their report:

- ☆ 1 in 5 high school girls reported being sexually or physically abused
- ☆ 1 in 4 girls reported having depression
- ☆ Self-confidence and health readings declined in high school for girls but not for boys
- ☆ Eating disorders have been a particular risk for 1 in 6 girls in grades 5 - 12

Ms. Robinson further stated that adolescent girls were not having discussions with their physicians about critical health issues such as drugs, alcohol, smoking, eating disorders, STD's, pregnancy prevention, and the abuse they may experience. *Written testimony on file.*

Kimberly Welsby and Marilyn Evariste

Teen Voices

Miss Welsby is 15 years old and a teen editor for *Teen Voices* magazine. She testified that sexism is a big problem that can occur at home, school and work. She feels it occurs to make young women feel worthless, like their opinions don't matter. She feels that everyone should be able to voice his or her opinion. She stated that at work, women are usually not treated equally. At home, the father may prefer his son over his daughter and at school, teachers' fear that boys will snap more when angry than girls. Miss Welsby believes that girls who have been discriminated against should be allowed to prove their case to an administrator and not have the situation ignored.

Miss Evariste is a peer leader for *Teen Voices* magazine. She testified on the pressures young women face today. She talked about how young people feel pressure to conform even if it means doing things they know are wrong. She also noted that sometimes it is difficult to get the help they need. She used herself as an example of not being aware of programs available to girls and for the ones that she did know of, they concentrated on dance skills or modeling. Her point is that there needs to be funds available to help teens express themselves. *Teen Voices* is a real alternative to the glitzy, fashion-oriented teen magazines that exploit young people's insecurities. She also noted that girls do not have to be skinny, they do not have to be a certain color, just to feel pretty on the inside or even on the outside.

Valerie Johnson

The Ella J. Baker House

Ms. Johnson works with the Department of Youth Services. She came to testify on behalf of the girls who could not be at the hearing, the girls who are locked up in a DYS facility or babysitting. She began by noting that girls were coming into the system at an earlier age: at 12 and 13 years old. Some of them have been absent from school for an extended period of time. Many suffered from physical and sexual abuse. More and more caseworkers prefer handling

male-oriented caseloads rather than the overwhelming stresses that come with cases involving girls. Ms. Johnson wants the Commission to remember those girls who are marginalized the most. She testified about a young girl who was sentenced to two years in a facility for stabbing her boyfriend in self-defense and the case was treated as an attempted murder case. She also feels that it is important for young girls to get in touch with themselves on a spiritual level.

Bobbi Legal and Janaya Brown

Girls Inc. of Lynn

Miss Legal is with Girls Inc. of Lynn. She feels that one thing that needs to be changed is the way teachers teach. She testified that boys get special privileges and that teachers assume that girls don't want to do the same things as boys. She feels that teachers, in general, pay more attention to boys. Miss Legal also testified about the lack of after-school programs for all girls. The strengths of girls and young women need to be encouraged. She testified that girls need help in handling conflict; that some girls take the easy way out and chose to fight and this isn't right. Miss Legal concluded, "We need to understand that there's another way that we can get through things." *Written testimony on file.*

Miss Brown testified that girls need moral support especially when people put them down by telling them they will never get anywhere. She is concerned about young people's safety, especially in school, where gangs push kids around. Adults do not believe them when they say they are hurt or about what is going on.

Meleni Mhlaba

Adolescent Wellness Program

Ms. Mhlaba represents the Adolescent Wellness Program. She testified that the media plays an important role in shaping how and what girls should look like. She feels that it is critical that young people are given the access to media education in classrooms as well as after-school programs. Ms. Mhlaba believes that it is important to educate young people and have "conscious-raising financial workshops that teach them to purchase things responsibly." She testified that she also uses the arts as a means of helping adolescents get in touch with their mind, body, and spirit. Using drawing, poetry, music, and dance, she is able to get young people to talk about the issues relevant to them. It is also to get kids away from the TV, which some kids watch 22 - 28 hours a week.

Kenyatta Saunders

Teens Networking Teens RMSC

Miss Saunders represents the Teens Networking Teens program. She testified about how she used to run the Multicultural Club at her high school. She facilitated meetings that included white, black, Asian, and others in the school. She recalled that as a positive experience. She testified that even though we have come a long way, we still have a ways to go and work to do. She feels that there are still barriers, particularly between black and white people, especially involving girls. She feels that she represents those girls who feel the way she does, but do not speak up. Most importantly, Miss Saunders believes that when something does happens, if young women and girls keep quiet then they are doing what men and society want them to do. Just sit still, look pretty, have your nails done and say nothing. She would like to change that.

Suzi Kim, Karl-Lydie Jean-Baptiste and Haimanat Neguse

Youth Voice Collaborative

Ms. Kim discussed the Youth Voice Collaborative. It is a media literacy program that is designed to give young people the tools to think critically about the media. She testified that it is important to have programs that deal with feminist issues. She explained, “The only way to challenge myths around the word “feminism” is to have gender equitable programs where men also voice their concerns around issues where women are not treated equally as well as men.” Ms. Kim feels that rather than chastising young people for listening to artists like Eminem, we should give them the necessary skills to think critically about what he and others are saying and where the images are coming from.

Miss Jean-Baptiste testified that within the youth programs there should be a leader.

Miss Neguse, peer leader with Youth Voice Collective, testified that young people should be able to bring their truths to the program.

Rubia Reyes

Latino Health Institute

Ms. Reyes represents the Latino Health Institute. She testified that she is concerned about discrimination. She came to Boston from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, where most people are Mexican or Mexican-American; coming to college in Boston changed that dynamic. She testified that issues of discrimination, particularly against girls from different ethnic groups and backgrounds, make it difficult to succeed. At her college, minorities are so few that when an incident does happen it is very seldom dealt with harshly. She talked about experiencing ignorant comments, and vocalized stereotypes. Ms. Reyes also discussed the obstacles that young Latina women face going to college. She also stated that she felt racial discrimination was not talked about enough and that there needs to be more groups to allow that discussion to happen. She encouraged the Commission and other organizations to diversify.

Miriam Messinger

The City School

Ms. Messinger testified that The City School brings young women and men together from across racial, class, and gender lines. They come from public, parochial, and private schools. She sees depression, stress, and suicidal thoughts as some of the things that have stood out in her dealings with young people. She feels that these feelings were not individual issues, but driven by racism, sexism, and homophobia. She told a story of a young woman who felt suicidal because she is a lesbian and of another young woman who feels she cannot go out for fear of unwanted sexual attention. Ms. Messinger noted that a therapist told one of those girls that she thought too much and gave her a prescription for Prozac, as if that is the solution to these problems. She feels that how we deal with the underlying racism and sexism in mental health issues is also connected to the lack of attention to young people’s spirit and culture.

Jessica Schoengold

Patriots’ Trail Girl Scouts Council

Ms. Schoengold talked about the innovative programs that exist under the Girl Scouts umbrella involving health and wellness, pregnancy prevention, and creative expression programs. She

talked about a program that she coordinates called Girls Pipeline to Power. It helps girls to become activists in their communities. They also did a phone survey prior to the last election. They phoned 400 girls nationwide and found that girls in girl scouting programs were more confident, twice as likely to have thought about running for a public office and were more likely to run for an elected position at their school or religious institution. She concluded by reiterating the importance of girls' programs and listening to the voices of girls.

Winona Campbell

Hyde Park

Ms. Campbell is from Hyde Park. She came with her daughter, who spoke earlier at the hearing. Ms. Campbell testified that in Hyde Park, there are several places that young people could go after school but end up hanging out on the streets. She spoke of how she tried to get SAT preparation for her daughter at the Boston Public Library, but the classes available in Boston were all over \$1,000. She found that there were a variety of SAT preparation classes for less money in the suburbs. She reminded all of the mothers in the room to stand by their daughters.

Mary Smoyer, President

Women's Heritage Trail

Ms. Smoyer testified about the Women's Heritage Trail, which was founded 12 years ago to recover the history of Boston women. They found 185 women who were remarkable and thus created the Trail. Ms. Smoyer testified that we need to look at the public spaces around us. We need to look at the names of the spaces and change the public image of them. She noted that the Freedom Trail has no women on it and the Black History Trail has only two women and they are the wives of men mentioned on the tour. Tourists that come to Massachusetts should see that woman have contributed to Boston history as much as men.

Tess Brown

Mass Action for Women

Ms. Brown spoke about Mass Action for Women's special project in 1999 - 2000 where they worked with young women in the greater Boston area. She testified that it was the young women who organized workshops and they stated that racial discrimination and the need for greater multicultural work need to be done. Teen pregnancy, sex, and peer pressure were issues that came out of the workshops. She stated that it was equally important to get more women involved in media industries and that all of us should support media that is sensitive to women.

Trina Jackson

STAR Program at Casa Myrna Vasquez

Ms. Jackson testified on the seriousness of dating violence. She stated that many adults do not take this issue seriously. Young women talk to one another but not to adults. Groups and programs like STAR need to be supported. She feels that young women deserve to know the warning signs of an abusive relationship, to know what a healthy relationship is and the right to choose not to be in a relationship at all. She testified that racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism are the root of many of the issues facing girls. She urges the Commission to address race, poverty, childhood sexual abuse, and homelessness and to continue to support laws that protect adolescent victims of dating violence.

Heidi Hansberry and Emily Salway

Wellesley Students Against Destructive Decisions

Miss Hansberry is a Junior at Wellesley High School. Despite the progress women have made in society, she expressed concerns about the lack of positive reinforcement for young women and their goals. She noted that the stress and pressure to succeed in Wellesley is abundant. Very often it is hard to deal with during the school year. She testified that pressure to succeed needs to be converted into encouragement. She also noted that her peers have turned to more negative ways of coping with pressure, primarily by getting drunk on the weekends. She said, "Drugs and alcohol shouldn't be the only option for stress relief for hard working young women." She suggests having stress relief programs and opening sports centers and coffeehouses specifically for young people. Miss Hansberry believes that hard working teens should be rewarded and supported.

Ms. Salway is a licensed social worker at Wellesley High School. She testified about the stresses and strains that young people live with as children living in affluent, suburban areas. She stated that young people are either left alone at home for hours at a time or are raised by someone other than their parents. She routinely sees students suffering from eating disorders and depression. A big problem, she stated, is that very often she cannot advise or help students under 18 without signed permission from their parents. There have been several occasions where parents have refused to sign permission slips to allow their children to get the help they need. She believes that it may be helpful to start parental training programs to assist parents in raising their kids in today's world. Many parents' denial that there is even a problem is what keeps kids depressed and starving themselves. She concluded by saying that parents need support and need to know that it's okay to let their kids have outside support.

Janet Howell

Junior League

Ms. Howell testified about the initiative that the Junior League began five years ago to work on the positive development of adolescent girls. They started out mentoring a handful of girls, with 50 volunteers at only three sites. When the project finished last June, they had 900 girls at 26 sites. Ms. Howell stated that through the whole process, the young girls were the teachers. She concluded by saying, "Their input on our organization has been fantastic."

Hilandia Neuta-Rendon

WEEA Equity Resource Center/EDC

Ms. Neuta-Rendon testified that the main goal at EDC is to "educate the entire nation in regards to gender equity." She also feels that this dialogue must include men and boys; they are a component that cannot be ignored. She applauded those young women who brought up racial and diversity issues but noted that certain cultures have different concepts of gender equity and that we need to be mindful of this. Ms. Rendon testified that there should be a young woman present on the Commission to fairly represent young people and to diversify at the political level.

Jewel Cash and J. Layla Louis

Miss Cash and Miss Louis are both 11 years old. They testified on the physical and verbal abuse that they witness everyday at school and on the bus. The disrespect of women and girls in music and on television disturbs them. They jointly discussed child abuse at home and how it affected a

friend they knew, that sometimes this leads to acting out at school. They said that poor body image is also a serious problem. They also recognize that peer pressure is powerful. They testified that for some girls, the only after-school program they have is MTV and cable television. Teen pregnancy is a big issue for young girls. Both Miss Cash and Miss Louis mentioned that for some girls, having a baby means that they will have someone to love and someone to love them back and they do not realize the honor and responsibility of being a mother. *Written testimony on file.*

Janice Guild, Police Officer
Wellesley Police Department

Ms. Guild was appointed to the Wellesley Police Department in 1987, the only female in an all male department. She testified that despite the fact that law enforcement is primarily male, females are getting into it. She further stated that she has been placed in the school system and considers herself a prevention officer. Ms. Guild stated that she tries to educate young people in safety issues and drug prevention. She believes that underlying all of these issues is respect, responsibility, and education. People have to work together and get things done.

Eric Green
Youth Voice Collaborative

Mr. Green testified that he was glad to be at the hearing and gave his support to all the young women and girls there. He feels that the times are changing in a positive way and that the world is becoming more of an equal one and less of a male dominated one. Despite the fact that many girls want to be singers or dancers, he would like to see more women represented in business.

Jewel Cash, Sr.
Boston Neighborhood Network

Ms. Cash came with her daughter, who also spoke at the hearing. She testified that on her own, she learned that Boston residents could learn how to use video equipment and studio equipment. She learned how to do that and now she is able to tape the hearing as a result. She testified that it is very important to get these issues out to the public. She feels that everyone must teach the children and that a mentor or a role model has helped us all. We must teach young boys and men the importance of respecting women.

Additional Written Testimony

Veronica Burgos
South Boston

Miss Burgos is a senior at South Boston High School. Her written testimony focuses on her community, which she feels “is not a good community.” She writes that her community needs help with communication and self-esteem for the youth. She explains “that is why the majority of them don’t know how to say no to any kind of drugs.” Another problem Miss Burgos addressed in her letter was that of abuse in the home, particularly the sexual abuse one of her friends experienced by her father. *Written testimony on file.*

Cindy Guerrero

Miss Guerrero is a teenager with a child. In her letter she explains that she has been out of school for three months with her child. She enjoys being around other teenagers with children. She concludes by writing, “We should have more help with our kids, more support and more understanding. Most of the schools should have daycare.” *Written testimony on file.*

Alisa Lemberg***Cambridge***

Miss Lemberg is a high school student who writes about the social discrimination of women. She writes: “It has come to my attention that public schools not only support but to some degree also encourage traditional gender roles. This can be seen in student relations, class choices, [and] the manner in which classes are taught.” Her letter addresses those areas of discrimination and concludes by suggesting that teachers participate in sensitivity training on women’s and gay and lesbian issues. *Written testimony on file.*

Sylvana Mendoza***Alianza Hispana***

Miss Mendoza submitted written testimony saying that she thinks that women everywhere should be proud of being women because they have to stand up for themselves. *Written testimony on file.*

Cristina Noonan***Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services***

Miss Noonan is a 14-year-old peer educator for Shades of Color at the Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS). Her letter expresses her feelings about sexual harassment. She writes that “the media puts out messages that say it’s okay to sexually harass women, so people go on thinking that it’s normal and an okay thing to do.” She also points out that sexual harassment is a painful thing to experience. *Written testimony on file.*

Teasha Purdy***Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services***

Miss Purdy is a peer educator representing the Shades of Color program at Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS). She writes about the issues faced by transgendered women. She explains that “although not born biologically female, I do live my life, I am perceived as a woman and do live my life as one daily.” Specific issues Miss Purdy wrote about include health care for transgendered individuals and hormone treatment. *Written testimony on file.*

Phoeurth Sao***Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services***

Miss Sao is a peer educator for Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS). Her written testimony focuses on issues pertaining to sex workers and prostitution. She “strongly encourage[s] the public to support women, whether [they] want to be a sex worker or not.” She believes that the “government should not interfere on what women want to do with their bod[ies]. Who can say no? Only them.” Miss Sao ended her testimony by noting that she would

like to see women of color educated and receive access to health care clinics. *Written testimony on file.*

Tristan Smith

Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services

Mr. Smith is a peer educator representing the Shades of Color program at Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS). He writes: “There are so many issues that affect the female population negatively. Us men don’t appreciate women as much and when we do acknowledge the females we tend to be offensive.” His letter goes on to address the way women are perceived because of the clothing they wear. He thinks that women should not be judged based on their clothing because “everyone, not only women, have the right to wear what they want.” *Written testimony on file.*

Desmond Smith-Payne

Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services

Miss Smith-Payne is a peer educator for Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services’ (GLASS) Shades of Color program. She submitted written testimony about the issue of domestic violence. She quoted from *ColorLines* that “50% of women will be battered by their spouse/partner.” This statistic disturbs Miss Smith-Payne and she suggests that teaching people about violence at a younger age might help. *Written testimony on file.*

Bonita Walker

Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services

Miss Walker wrote that she is a 17-year-old black female representing the Boston Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS). Her testimony addresses the issue of the “perfect woman” stereotype that women are “literally killing themselves to become.” She writes that “this stereotype varies with different cultures, but I know as a black young woman the demand for me to have a big ass, healthy chest with ample intelligence, but never to exceed that of a man, is just the bare minimum to be considered attractive.” She further wrote that the message is confusing and unrealistic and often leads to eating disorders. Miss Walker sees changing the media as one solution. *Written testimony on file.*

Issue Boards



Participants were invited to write anonymous comments on post-it notes and stick them to the appropriate Issue Board during the hearing.

Girls’ Issues

- ☆ Teen pregnancy, drug abuse and homelessness
- ☆ Sexual harassment against girls
- ☆ Finding a trustworthy adult to talk to
- ☆ Deal with boys with “authority” attitudes over girls

- ☆ Everything from politics to boys

Health Care

- ☆ Making sure doctors know what they are doing
- ☆ Teen Pregnancy prevention, awareness about birth control, STD's
- ☆ Having access to annual exams

Child Care

- ☆ Planning for the future from the day children are born

Other

- ☆ More, younger women of color on commission
- ☆ Find ways to include girls in DSS custody
- ☆ Concerns over eating disorders, self-mutilation, providing parental training