

Maryland Commission for Women

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 23, 2026

5:00 PM

Virtual

Commissioner Attending:

LaShaune Stitt, Chair
Patricia Lambert, First Vice Chair
Christine Lee, Second Vice Chair
Tazeen Ahmad
Judy Carbone
Gloria Dent
Tekisha Everette
Maggi Gaines
Linda Han
Jodi Kelber
Joyce King
Sarah Klein
Gabriela Lemus
Fiona Oliphant
Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz
Nichelle Schoultz
Michelle Siri

Commissioners Absent:

Pier Blake
Nyki Robinson
Stacey Rebbert
Monica Watkins

Staff Attending:

Ariana Kelly, Executive Director
Brett Jordan, Program Manager
Genesis Franco, Management Associate

Additional Attendees:

Judi Emmel, Commissioner, Maryland 250 Commission
Kaylee Mendoza-Diaz, student, University of Maryland, College Park
Caitlin Hassan, student, University of Maryland, College Park
Megan Mulligan, student, University of Maryland, College Park
Abigail Letocha, MPP Student, University of Maryland, College Park
Sharon Blugis, Foundation Treasurer

5:00 I. Call to Order.....LaShaune Stitt, Chair
The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. Chair Stitt welcomed all Commissioners and guests.

- A. Land Acknowledgement
- B. Attendance for April Meeting
- C. Approval of Agenda and January Minutes
Chair LaShaune Stitt called for approval of the agenda and January Minutes.
Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz seconded the motion. The minutes and agenda were approved unanimously.
- D. Introduction of New Commissioner
Commissioner Nichelle Schoultz introduced herself.

5:05 II. Legislation & Policy Update

- A. Report Progress on Legislative Priorities.....Monica Watkins
Commissioner Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz delivered Monica’s legislative report, noting that all top priority bills passed:
The menopause bill, the OTC contraception bill and a third bill updating the Commission’s statutory language and honoring former Speaker Adrienne Jones. She also noted Senator Washington’s women’s pre-release bill passed.
- B. Menopause Update.....LaShaune Stitt, Chair
Menopause bill to be signed next month. The work group will partner with the foundation to continue work and submit a required report to the General Assembly by October 1, 2027 with policy recommendations.
- C. OTC Contraception Update.....Christine Lee
OTC birth control bill passed. Final OTC collaborative report is due in December, with ongoing work throughout the year, including planning a student condom design contest in partnership with the foundation.
- D. Sine Die Report & Economic SecurityShanna Pearson-Merkowitz
Commissioners were encouraged to review the end-of-session report on women’s health, caregiving, and women in the workplace & society bills. She also acknowledged Executive Director Kelly’s hard work this session.

The Policy Committee will continue menopause work during the interim, and their focus on economic security across the lifespan. She also noted that Delegate Wolek’s *Workgroup for an Inclusive State Workplace* names the Commission as a participant. Commissioner Pearson-Merkowitz then introduced the student researchers that she and Brett Jordan worked with this year to research our policy priorities. She encouraged Commissioners to reach out to the Policy Committee if they have ideas for future research.

5:25 III. Student Presentations (45 Min)

- A. **Kaylee Mendoza-Diaz** - UMD-College Park (5 Min)
Childcare Access and Affordability
Presented on the high cost and limited access to childcare in Maryland, noting very high infant care costs driven by workforce shortages, staffing requirements, and limited scholarship access. Highlighted three recently passed bills that could

help ease the strain on the Child Care Scholarship Program that is currently frozen: [SB503/HB 561](#) Maryland Child Care Credential Program - Extension of Funding; [SB668/HB 680](#) Children's Cabinet Fund - Renaming and Funding for Grants to Local Management Boards; [HB849](#) Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment. All three bills are listed in the Commission's [End of Session report](#).

Kaylee shared three new policy options based on programs in other states: funding to build affordable family child care homes, like [Colorado](#)'s Rural Homes Initiative; employer-funded child care programs that take the financial burden off parents, like Missouri's; and a phased-in universal child care program, like New Mexico's. That program would focus on training child care providers and supporting them in starting new businesses, before turning to support consumers/parents.

Q&A from Commissioners. (3 Min)

B. Caitlin Hassan - UMD-College Park (5 Min)

Adult Caregiving

Presented on ways of supporting caregivers for adult family members. A quarter of Maryland adults are family caregivers and many of them face financial challenges due to the time and expense required to care for loved ones. Caitlin referenced [SB113/HB278](#) the Longevity Ready Maryland Act and [SB809/HB1280](#) Caregiver Infrastructure Program feasibility study (due July 2028), recent policies that will inform future caregiving models and needs. She recommended a state-run long term care insurance program, like that of Washington State, and direct financial support to caregivers, like Hawaii's program. The feasibility study referenced above would inform any direct funding for caregivers.

Q&A from Commissioners. (3 Min)

C. Megan Mulligan - UMD-College Park (5 Min)

Retirement readiness

Presented on women's retirement readiness in Maryland, noting challenges related to wage gaps, longer life expectancy, and limited retirement savings, with many women concerned about outliving their savings. Megan also discussed [SB113/HB278](#) the Longevity Ready Maryland Act and the Department of Aging's Longevity Ready Maryland initiative as promising avenues to address the systemic issues preventing women from adequately saving for retirement. She also highlighted the Maryland Saves program and possible methods of bolstering it, including state-funded contributions to individual retirement plans and tying it to the state's Earned Income Tax Credit to better assist low-income Marylanders.

Q&A from Commissioners. (3 Min)

D. Abigail Letocha - UMD-College Park MPP Student (8 Min)

Access to On-Campus Child Care for Student Parents at Public Colleges & Universities

Presented on childcare access for student parents at Maryland’s public colleges and universities. Barriers to access include funding challenges for both parents and institutions, as well as the hours typically offered by child care centers. The first step in establishing the level of need is gathering information from and about student parents, which the state will now do thanks to [SB420/HB6 Pregnant and Parenting Students - Plan and Reporting](#), a bill sponsored by Senator Mary Washington and Delegate Ken Kerr that passed during the 2026 legislative session. Abby also recommended pilot programs for drop-in care and direct funding for parenting students, as well as working with the Maryland Higher Education Commission to coordinate campus resources and share those resources with students.

Q&A from Commissioners. (3 Min)

6:10 II. Awards & Outreach Committee Update

- A. Hall of Fame Recap.....Pier Blake
Commissioner Gloria Dent provided Pier Blakes’ Hall of Fame recap in her absence, noting strong attendance, an engaging program using Commissioners to induct honorees, and appreciation for staff and Commission support.
- B. May 7 Local Commissions Meeting.....Tekisha Everette
The local commissions subcommittee is planning a meeting on May 7, including the Montgomery County Commission’s work related to trafficking prevention efforts and the Wicomico Commission for Women’s work related to the local child care facilities tax credit. They will also discuss coordination of existing awards programs supporting young women.
- C. National Issues Report Update.....Pat Lambert
The National Issues Report is in progress and expected to be circulated to the Committee soon, with a goal of release before July 1.
- D. Upcoming Sponsored Partner Events.....Judy Carbone
 - RJ Maryland Tea- May 2 - Delegate Lesley Lopez being honored.
 - Women’s Law Center Awards - May 5- Ariana Kelly being honored.

6:30 Foundation Update

- A. Fall Event.....Sarah Klein
The foundation is exploring a potential event in October to support menopause work. A Foundation meeting will be scheduled during June to discuss details..
- B. Treasurer Report.....Sharon Blugis
ED Kelly shared the current cash balance for Sharon Blugis of \$113,692.80. Current funds include 3 pass through grants for community colleges received from the Straus Foundation. Actual Foundation balance is \$83,692.
- C. Continued Internship for Alex Mayan VelasquezAriana Kelly
The foundation will be supporting Alex’s internship through the next year, with an expectation that the state will be able to return to funding the internship program in FY28..

6:45 IV. Staff Report

- A. Genesis Distributed Intent to Run Forms via Email– Due May 7.
- B. Staffing Update
- C. Incoming Commissioners

The staff update was provided by Brett Jordan and included notice that Camille Fabiyi is not working for Delegate Malcom Ruff, and her position will be filled shortly. It also noted that the June meeting will be an in-person election of Commission officers, with five new commissioners invited as guests.

6:55 V. Calendar & New Business

There was no new business to report.

7:00 VI. Adjournment.....LaShaune Stitt, Chair

Chair Stitt thanked everyone for attending the meeting today. There being no further business, she adjourned the meeting at 6:42pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Ariana Kelly, Executive Director
Maryland Commission for Women
04/29/2026