



A Call to Action: Improving the Status of Women and Girls in Tallahassee/Leon County

2013-2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Tallahassee/Leon County
Commission on the Status
of Women and Girls

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THE GOAL of this Report is to raise awareness of the status of women and girls in the Tallahassee/Leon County area and make recommendations as to how this status could be improved. This report marks **the first time** that local government and the community have specific and comprehensive recommendations, from a Commission, for action to address and improve the status of women and girls.

The Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls' first report² examined and described how women and girls fare in the areas of Crime and Justice, Economic Security, Education, Health, and Leadership.

The Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) authored "A Call to Action," which builds upon the data and work of that first Report and offers 100 **Recommendations for Action** for the whole community in the areas of: the **workplace and economic security, violence, health** and on what we all can do to help **girls**. This report and these initial recommendations mark the first steps toward addressing hundreds of years of discrimination against women and girls. There are many other areas that remain ripe for examination and action by future commissions and the community.

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- » **Created a Girls Services Coalition** — For the first time, the many groups and people who provide services to girls now have a place to network, coordinate services, leverage resources and work together to improve and better assist girls to grow and thrive.
- » **Convened a Summit on Women and the Workplace** — In October 2013, a first of its kind Summit brought together over 220 participants and experts from our area and the nation to learn and strategize ways to improve how women can be more economically secure at work. 96% surveyed said they would apply what they learned to improve the status of women in their workplace.
- » **Worked for the Adoption of County and City Policies on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Stalking** — Addressing issues brought to the fore by the CSWG and with over 100 hours of CSWG technical assistance, both the City and County have adopted the most comprehensive and supportive personnel policies to address both victimization and perpetration of these crimes at the workplace. Over 3,500 employees will be educated and receive support so that both their workplaces and our community are safer.
- » **Listened and Learned: Public Hearings** — Citizens of the community offered their opinions and expertise broadly on issues facing women and girls and specifically on how we can better address the high rates of violence against women and girls locally in three community wide public hearings.
- » **Produced a Report and Recommended Actions to Improve the Status of Women and Girls** — Detailed research and 100 comprehensive recommendations for action will help forge a path for the City, County and the community to work together to improve the lives of women and girls in the areas of: the workplace and economic security, violence, girls and health.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Recommendations for Action in this executive summary detail key steps this community should undertake to improve the status of women and girls; many more are found in the body of the Report.

1. All citations to data in this executive summary can be found in the full Report. | 2. <http://www.theoasiscenter.net/12.html>

They are directed toward multiple sectors and organizations including City and County governments, local businesses, chambers of commerce and non-profits, social services and the justice system, local schools and institutions of higher learning and many more. Some can be accomplished over the short term with minimal cost, others are longer term and represent the need for greater resources and focused efforts. Almost *all* of the 100 recommendations will require partnerships and collaboration across many different sectors, public and private alike.

CHAPTER 1: COMMISSION ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

The 21-member CSWG, staffed by The Oasis Center for Women & Girls, Inc., organized itself into three process-focused committees: Organization and Bylaws, Funding and Budget, and Data. These staff and committees helped guide the other committees and the CSWG as a whole in their work. Since the CSWG is a relatively new entity, these committees worked to build a strong foundation for future work.

CHAPTER 2: KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

- » Women and girls outnumber men and boys in our area: 52.3% of Leon County residents are women, 47.7% are men.
- » In Leon County, 62.3% of residents are White, 30.8% are Black/African American, 3.2% are Asian, and 3.4% comprise other races (including other races). 6.2% (all races) are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.
- » Leon County's poverty rate, at 22.8%, is much higher than Florida's, which is 15.6%. However, when college students who do not live with relatives are excluded, the Leon County poverty rate drops to 16.7% and the Florida poverty rate drops to 15.5%.
- » Women and men experience poverty at comparable rates in Leon County (22.0% for women and 21.3% for men). However, there is a large wealth gap between single mothers and single fathers. In Leon County, there are approximately 6,435 households with children living below the poverty line, and single mothers head 87% of these.

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY AND

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN AND THE WORKPLACE

- » Women are a driving force in our economy, worldwide and locally. Women control about 60% of household wealth and drive over 80% of household consumption worldwide.
- » Nationally, women earn 77 cents for each dollar a man makes; in Florida, the ratio is slightly better at 83 cents to the dollar. In the Second Congressional District, which includes Leon County, the earnings ratio is slightly better still at 88 cents. Nationally, women's median annual earnings in 2012 were \$37,791 compared to \$49,398 for men.
- » Women in Leon County are more likely than men to be single parent heads of household and, thus, primary caregivers of children; to earn lower wages; and to be victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. They also have greater need for time off for childbirth and for flexibility in attending to their children's needs.
- » Women have a harder time making ends meet. According to national data from Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), 81% of households headed by single mothers lack economic security, meaning they cannot make ends meet on basic needs like housing, transportation, food, childcare, and insurance.

- » The median household income for Leon County in 2013 was \$45,827. Yet, for a single mother with two children, one in preschool and one in school, it would cost \$56,064 for her to meet the most basic household expenses.
- » A workplace that has gender diversity both at the top and in the lower ranks of the organization performs better, and makes, as a recent Gallup study says: “bottom line business sense.”
- » Nationally, 21% of full-time, employed adults were victims of domestic violence and 64% of them indicated their work performance was significantly impacted.
- » There are cultural and societal factors at work that negatively affect women’s access to health care as women are more likely than men to work part time and be in lower wage jobs such as food service industry and other service sectors that are far less likely to provide sick days or health insurance than workers in higher paying jobs.
- » The lower a woman’s income, the greater the likelihood that she will experience chronic disease. Across income groups the risk of poor health rises steadily as income decreases.
- » Promoting entrepreneurship among women is an important issue for women as well as the community at large. It affords women with personal opportunities and community job creation; however, women face significant barriers to entrepreneurship, including the lack of experience and managerial skills, training and education needed to become entrepreneurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The CSWG, in partnership with the City, the County, and others as needed, should build awareness of women’s economic security challenges, including localized data measures that verify the need for local reforms.

The CSWG and local Chambers of Commerce should collect and distribute information on promising practices and examples of workplaces successfully promoting work/life balance; also those that advance and promote women’s leadership.

The CSWG should host and/or partner with the City, County, local chambers of commerce, local institutions of higher learning, women’s organizations and all other community groups to host a Summit to focus on women’s economic security issues, at least every two years.

The CSWG should partner with others in the community, act as a clearinghouse to collect, and promote model practices on gender diversity in the workplace, and distribute research on the benefits of diversity to employers in our area, particularly showing how diversity makes for a stronger organization and better “bottom line.”

The City and County should increase funding for services for individuals who are economically insecure — particularly women and children.

The Economic Development Council of Tallahassee/Leon County and others in the community who promote economic development should make it a top priority to assist employers in creating jobs that pay living wages and where gender pay disparity is reduced and eliminated.

CHAPTER 5: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

- » Women and girls experience violence within the social, cultural, political and economic contexts that prevail in the communities in which they live. These contexts are shaped by individual and collective attitudes that affect the behavior of perpetrators, victims, witnesses and the community-at-large.
- » The National Crime Victimization Survey shows that sexual violence is the most under-reported serious crime in the United States. Studies show that more than half of women at some point in their lives will be the victims of some form of sexual violence, but only a quarter or less will ever report it.
- » In Leon County, the number of total forcible sex offenses declined by 10.2% from 2011 to 2012. However, the incidents of rape by force increased by 9% in the same time period.
- » Despite the best efforts of local service providers, there are gaps that still need to be addressed in order to have a truly comprehensive response that addresses the multiple needs of victims of violence, particularly women.
- » According to a 2009 study of school bullying, boys were more involved in physical or verbal bullying, while girls were more involved in relational bullying. Boys were more likely to be cyber bullies, while girls were more likely to be cyber victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Key community stakeholders, including coalitions and coordinating agencies, the City, the County, law enforcement agencies, judicial sector agencies, institutes of higher education, health professionals, social and economic service agencies, and victim service providers, should collaborate on a comprehensive public awareness campaign that emphasizes that every individual, organization, business and government entity has a role in reducing violence against women and girls.

Local non-profits should work to develop a shared protocol for services to victims of sexual and domestic violence. The protocol should include common data/information collection, appropriate releases, and confidentiality protections to help victims who report crimes and seek assistance so that they are not re-victimized by having to tell their stories repeatedly and so that they are not forced to go to multiple venues to obtain services.

Local institutions of higher learning should collaborate on a public awareness campaign regarding the incidence and prevalence of rape on campus with a focus on developing responses and a climate that promotes respectful relationships, and supports help for victims.

The City and County should continue to implement their newly adopted policies on domestic and sexual violence and stalking by providing ongoing information to all employees, contractors and vendors regarding the policy, and developing and instituting regular training on the topic.

The City and County, in collaboration with the local Chambers of Commerce, should develop public-private partnerships to educate employees and leadership/management about the importance of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking policies.

CHAPTER 6: GIRLS

- » The newly established Girls Services Coalition provides ways that the community can increase its understanding of the best and innovative practices. The ultimate goal is to increase the knowledge of available services to the organizations that are focused on serving girls as well as to increase networking and collaborative opportunities.
- » According to Girls Services Coalition participants:
 - Bullying between and among girls has seen a sharp increase in the past few years with the advent of social media.
 - Dating violence, including date rape and statutory rape, is a prevalent problem.
 - Girls are de-valuing their bodies without an understanding of the short- or long-term consequences. From the clothes they wear to the pop icons they admire, girls are reflecting what they see in society, especially those with few, if any, counteracting influences in their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The CSWG, together with the Girls Services Coalition, should create capacity-building initiatives for girls' service providers in several areas (e.g., negotiation skills, anti-bullying/anti-cyber bullying, mentor selection and training, and collaboration among girls for usage with peers and adults).

The CSWG should continue funding and supporting the Girls Services Coalition, until it becomes self-sustaining.

CHAPTER 7: HEALTH

- » Physical and mental health are very important components of women's and girls' overall well being and are closely connected to women's poverty and education levels.
- » The lack of health insurance creates major barriers for those seeking medical care; there are approximately 21,000 uninsured women and girls in Leon County.
- » Uninsured women are less likely to receive preventive care and services for major health conditions and chronic diseases.
- » Too many babies, especially African American babies, are dying in Leon County before their first birthdays. In 2012, 28 babies born in the County died compared to 18 in 2011. This increase brought the County's infant mortality rate to 9.3 per 1,000 live births, higher than the state average (6/1000 live births) and representing an approximate 60% increase from the previous year.
- » In Leon County, from 2010-2012, the birth rate to teen mothers was more than three times greater for Black teens than their White counterparts; the rate for White teens for the three-rolling-year term was 9.6, with a 31.5 rate for Black teens.
- » There is a growing body of research and literature that suggests racism may be the largest indicator of fetal and infant mortality in African-American women.
- » Living in poverty is a foundational cause of stress, poor nutrition, poor access to quality health care, and other contributors to poor birth outcomes.
- » At both the local and national levels, STIs continue to be a public health problem, particularly

among women, who tend to face more long-term STI consequences. Untreated STIs cause infertility in 24,000 American women annually, while untreated syphilis among pregnant women causes infant death in nearly 40% of cases.

- » Out of all 67 Florida counties, Leon County had the 12th highest rate of bacterial STIs for women between the ages of 15 and 34 in 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Because public misunderstanding about the Affordable Care Act remains high, the City and County should support additional community events and public forums throughout the next year in order to help citizens adjust to the law and determine the best course of action for themselves and their families.

The CSWG should serve as a catalyst to encourage local stakeholders, including but not limited to the FSU College of Medicine, Capital Area Healthy Start Coalition, and Whole Child Leon, to endorse and provide resources for its Pre-Conception Health Conferences, one series for health care providers and another for women in our community, which should be held at least annually.

Stakeholders such as the City, the County, and the local institutions of higher learning should work together for a public service announcement (“PSA”) to publicize educational HIV/AIDS and STI prevention and treatment material in various sources — newspaper, billboards, public service ads on television, experts on local talk shows.

Projects like 95210 Eating the Rainbow should continue, and the City and County should support expansion of food, nutrition and physical fitness programs that deliver direct services in a holistic and practical way so that infant mortality and other health care-related harms plaguing our area, particularly in documented “food deserts,” can be addressed and so reduced.



Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

To learn more about the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, please visit <http://cms.leoncountyfl.gov/committees/detail.asp?id=123> or <http://www.talgov.com/treasurer/tlccswg.aspx> or www.theoasiscenter.net. You can also reach The Oasis Center for Women & Girls, Inc., by phone at 850-222-2747. To download the entire report, "A Call to Action: Improving the Status of Women and Girls in Tallahassee/Leon County 2013-2014," please visit www.theoasiscenter.net.

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