

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2018-2019 commission year, the Tallahassee-Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls worked to raise awareness about and develop collaborative strategies to address pressing issues involving women and girls in Tallahassee-Leon County, including high rates of poverty or financial insecurity among women, high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and strategies for reducing the occurrence of sexual assault and power-based violence against women.

Commissioners initiated partnerships and leveraged existing relationships to achieve progress in these critical areas. The breadth of partnership pursued by the CSWG extends throughout our community and includes local and state government, private for-profit business, nonprofit organizations and human service agencies, media, educational institutions, and community advocates. The full list of partners contributing to the work detailed in this report numbers more than 50, a sample of which can be found on the facing page.

To foster a broader understanding of the impact of the efforts made by the CSWG for the benefit of new and existing City and County commissioners, CSWG leadership compiled a list of some of the advancements in the status of women and girls achieved with the support of CSWG since its inception in 2011. The list, found on page 5, includes improvements to public safety procedures and training, workplace policies that increase support for women employees, improvements to communication and functionality among human service providers, and more. A snapshot of the advisory board's work, the list will be maintained, updated, and included in periodic reports to the Tallahassee City Commission and the Leon County Board of County Commissioners.

### Strides in Governance Spur Strategic Change

The Organization and Bylaws Committee (OBC) undertook the task of drafting a three-year strategic plan, with input from commissioner liaisons of both the City and County governing bodies. The strategic plan identifies a new, collective impact approach to addressing the critical issues facing women and girls in Tallahassee-Leon County with guidance for improved communication between the CSWG and the local governments it serves. The new framework represents a significant evolution of the commission's work with improvements to efficiency, responsiveness, cohesion, and potential impact.

Moving forward, in consultation with liaisons on the City Commission and Board of County Commissioners, the CSWG leadership will identify one pressing issue facing the community on which to focus the advisory

board's efforts each year. Committees will work on the issue within their subject areas, guided by the goals and initiatives outlined in the strategic plan. They will select appropriate strategies to contribute collaborative, solutions-oriented work and produce actionable policy and funding recommendations to achieve progress in critical areas. The plan is aligned with City and County goals and will be reviewed for updates on a bi-annual basis.

### Committee Work Addresses Critical Issues of Poverty, Infectious Disease, and Crime

While the OBC worked to strengthen the foundation and future of the commission, the topic area committees worked to amplify critical issues and foster change through research, partnership, planning, and advocacy.

The Education and Economic Security Committee responded to the heightened awareness around poverty in Tallahassee-Leon County and worked to amplify understanding of economic hardship as it relates to women. Nearly 80% of the women heads of household with children live daily in significant danger of being unable to meet their financial needs. In fact, according to Data USA, women make up the largest demographic of Leon County residents living in poverty.



*Education and Economic Security Committee members (from left) Amber R. Tynan, Gwendolyn Singleton, and Wendi Cannon discuss committee business.*

To better address the issue comprehensively and bring multi-sector decision making to bear on solutions, the committee began planning a Women's Economic Security Summit to take place in October 2019. The summit steering committee reflects a wide swath of area leaders. The goal of the summit is to convene leaders across disciplines and political leanings to find common

ground, make connections, deepen understanding, and explore solutions to the greatest financial and economic challenges facing women today. Attendees will gain a foundation for initiating change in the circumstance of poverty and economic insecurity for residents of Tallahassee-Leon County.

The Health and Development Committee tackled a public health crisis for which women bear a significant burden: sexually transmitted infections. Leon County is #1 in Florida and among the top 10 in the nation for rates of sexually transmitted infections, with health officials calling the sharp rise in primary and congenital syphilis “a sentinel event.” As the rate of STIs in Leon County surpasses other “university towns” in Florida and across the nation, the dramatic increase in syphilis and overall high rates of STIs cannot be exclusively explained by the large student population.

The committee engaged public health officials, public school officials, post-secondary personnel, medical practitioners, insurance providers, information technology experts, and the media to gather information on the scope of the problem, potential strategies, and opportunities for collaborative solutions. Their work is detailed in this report on pages 12-13 and will continue.

The Violence and Safety Committee worked to address violence against women in a year that saw shocking tragedy in the mass shooting at the Hot Yoga studio in Midtown, when a member of one of the Internet’s most dangerous subcultures, “incels” (involuntary celibate), targeted the location to kill women. Speaking at a press conference in February, then-Chief of Police, Michael DeLeo, described evidence that a “lifetime of misogynistic attitudes caused [the shooter] to attack a familiar community where he had been arrested several times for his previous violent action toward women.” Scott Beierle, 40, succeeded in killing a female student and professor at Florida State University and injuring five others before killing himself. According to an April 2019 article in Vox, the perpetrator is now being glorified by other incels online as “St. YogaCel.”

From this and other tragic losses of women’s lives by violence and sexual assaults of young women, both locally and nationally, the committee turned its attention to restructuring the public perception of violence against women. Rather than isolated tragic incidents, the Violence and Safety Committee is bringing awareness to the fact that these tragedies represent actions on a continuum of violence, the lesser of which often is dismissed or downplayed. The committee produced a list of tips for recognizing microaggressions, or behaviors regarded as subtle forms of discrimination against a marginalized group. The list is found on page 16. The committee also

convened several service provider workshops to support the people delivering front line services to survivors.

With suggestions for improving civic access and engagement, financial support services and pay equity, health information awareness, gender bias awareness, and public safety operations, the 2018-2019 Tallahassee-Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls proudly presents a report of its work and offers recommendations to the Tallahassee City Commission and Leon County Board of County Commissioners.

Along with the Women’s Economic Security Summit steering committee members listed on page 16, the following people and organizations provided material information and partnership to the work of the CSWG:

- American Council of Education (FAMU/FSU/TCC)
- Terry Anderson, Leon County Schools
- Meg Baldwin, JD, Refuge House
- Claudia Blackburn, RN, Florida Department of Health
- Jennie Brock, Wellcare Health Plans
- Tony Carvajal, Florida Chamber of Commerce
- Alan Cox, PhD, Leon County Schools
- James Easton, Florida Department of Health
- Talethia Edwards, Greater Bond Neighborhood Association
- Kimolyn Ferrell, Dare to Dream
- Lashawn Gordon, Pace-Leon Center for Girls
- Dale Harrison, Florida Department of Health
- Pat Holliday, City of Tallahassee
- David Hulse, Bank of America
- Liz Joyner, The Village Square
- Claudia Machado, Mothers Against Drunk Driving
- Unam Mansoor, Florida Department of Health
- Wachell McKendrick, PhD, Turn About Inc.
- Emily Mitchem, Refuge House
- Dominique Moore, Women With Worth
- Taylor Novak, Refuge House
- Cristina Paredes, Office of Economic Vitality
- Dr. Faye Rozwadowski, Florida Department of Health
- RoseAnn Scheck, Florida Department of Health
- Kelly Sciba, Florida Commission on the Status of Women
- Dr. Joedrecka Brown Speights, FSU College of Medicine
- Stomp Out Syphilis Coalition
- Tallahassee District Church School Convention
- Robin Hassler Thompson, JD, Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center
- United Partners for Human Services
- Alexandria Washington, United States of Women
- Scott Weisman, Leon County GIS Program Office
- Craig Wilson, Florida Department of Health