



# **Anne Arundel County Commission for Women**

**Annual Report 2019**

Respectfully submitted  
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by Sara Westrick Schomig, Chair  
[aaccwomen@gmail.com](mailto:aaccwomen@gmail.com)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Anne Arundel County Commission for Women (AACCW) began 2019 in a strong position with respect to member retention and sense of direction. Over the course of the year, the group continued to develop a robust array of outreach activities related to three priority areas of action: addressing the opioid epidemic, empowering women and girls, and combatting human trafficking.

Key partnerships with community and County organizations and a strong social media presence further enhanced these efforts. The Commission ended the year with a clear identity and a growing sense of what it can accomplish in the County for the betterment of all women and families.

Several prominent officials attended our meetings in 2019, including County Executive Stuart Pittman, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Dr. Kai Boggess-de Bruin, County State's Attorney Anne Colt Leitess, and Deputy County State's Attorney Colleen McGuinn. We also welcomed a number of interested members of the public who shared their views and insights with us, which we welcome and appreciate.

The AACCW ends the year in a robust position to consolidate gains in a number of areas of work, most notably advocating and organizing a County-wide stakeholders meeting on the topic of combatting human trafficking, reengaging on advocacy during the legislative session, and preparing for the Centennial Celebration to commemorate 100 years of women's suffrage.

## **OUR MISSION**

The mission of the AACCW continued to be the following:

The Anne Arundel County Commission for Women is a non-partisan advisory board that serves to provide leadership on important issues that affect the quality of life of Anne Arundel County women and families. This is accomplished through development and implementation of community outreach, educational programs, and advocacy, often through collaborative action with partner organizations in the public and private sectors.

## **OUR VISION**

The AACCW continued to stretch itself to realize a four-part vision:

- To serve as a highly visible, respected voice on issues of importance to women in Anne Arundel County.

- To expand possibilities for all women and girls and to advocate for empowerment and equality.
- To establish the Commission for Women as a leading organization on important local issues through collaborative partnerships.
- To serve as a liaison to the County Executive and County Council regarding women’s issues.

## **OUR IDENTITY & WHAT WE DO**

With limited financial resources to back its activities, in 2019 the AACCW continued to embrace its identity as a creative and enterprising volunteer organization that serves to:

- Connect & Liaise
- Convene & Moderate
- Facilitate & Integrate
- Support & Supply
- Advocate, Aid & Assist
- Amplify & Inform Through
  - In-person Meetings
  - Social Media (Website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
  - Programs & Events

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Due to the enhanced membership and recruitment policies developed in 2018, the AACCW enjoyed a relatively stable composition throughout 2019. Vacancies were quickly filled by the County Executive’s office with input and concurrence from the AACCW Membership Committee. The Commission continued to comprise diverse representatives of all women of Anne Arundel County and was known as a “working” Commission for women keenly interested in activities and outreach and serving for a full two-year term. As many of the terms of current Commissioners are set to expire in 2020, membership may once again rise to the top of the priority list in the coming year.

The Commission met in August for its annual strategy session. This all-day conference focused on personal and professional development, establishing goals for the upcoming year, and setting priorities for activities and outreach based on the availability, interest, and skill sets of our members. Full participation in this event enabled the AACCW to develop closer personal relationships and come together on how best to work as a group to fulfill the mission of the Commission. The Commission introduced initiatives such as supplemental working group in-person meetings as well as Facetime and Zoom calls to move our work forward.

## **LEGISLATIVE**

The AACCW legislative committee operated in monitoring mode in 2019, keeping a close eye on bills of interest to our areas of work, most notably bills focused on human trafficking and paid family leave. The committee also brainstormed way to become more involved in 2020 with the permission and concurrence of the County Executive. After discussions with him in October 2019, the AACCW made plans to coordinate with the Montgomery County Commission for Women and the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) more closely in 2020. In preparation for this, the Chair participated in a conference call regarding Advocacy Day 2020 and three commissioners attended the 2019 MLAW fall meeting. In December 2019, the AACCW voted to sign on to the MLAW agenda and submitted this request to the County for approval. In addition, the AACCW attended the 3rd annual Maryland Legislative Coalition Summit and gathered information from many NGOs and MD State Delegates about priority legislation for the 2020 MD general assembly session.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

In 2019, our social media presence continued to climb, resulting in increasing awareness of the Commission's existence and role. Many of our thematic working groups integrated social media campaigns into their efforts with branded hashtags such as #womensleadershipwednesday, #endtraffickingtuesday, #smashthestimga, and #recoveryoutloud. The AACCW translated some social media posts to Spanish, to reach and engage with the Anne Arundel Hispanic community.

Our social media reach attracted partners wishing to get their message out. When the goals were mutually beneficial, the AACCW was happy to leverage its audience. In 2019, the AACCW used Facebook live to help promote the Dash4Dignity 5K/1K to raise awareness about human trafficking, reaching nearly 3,500 viewers, as well as the Maryland Public Television (MPT) Women's Leadership Forum, reaching nearly 2,000 viewers. The AACCW also regularly used Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to promote its own events organized with the Anne Arundel County Public Library (AACPL). The AACCW even produced an interview with AACPL CEO Skip Auld focused on the library's policies regarding Internet safety.

In 2019, the AACCW also initialized the use of a newsletter and an event registration system to further enhance our outreach.

## **OUR PRIORITY AREAS OF WORK 2019**

### **Human Trafficking**

Combatting human trafficking was a key area of focus for the AACCW in 2019. Over the past several years, the Commission built a network of interlocuters on the subject and earned a

reputation as a convener of experts that can also bring important messages to the public. The AACCW remained committed to serving as an advocate and witness for populations vulnerable to trafficking and for persons seeking to recover from the trauma of trafficking in 2019.

The AACCW anti-human trafficking working group's mission is as follows:

- To eradicate human trafficking in Anne Arundel County through community awareness, education, advocacy, and efforts to support survivors.

In 2019, the AACCW invited Anne Arundel County State's Attorney Anne Colt Leites and Deputy State's Attorney Colleen McGuinn to attend the March meeting. The ensuing discussion helped inform the Commission's work for the coming months, most notably an aside question regarding whether the AACCW's trafficking in persons working group served as a *de facto* anti-trafficking task force for the County. (Our name and contact information are listed as such at the state level.)

The AACCW thus realized the need to have a more formal coordinating mechanism to fight human trafficking on the local level, prompting a decision to advocate with the County Executive for a task force-like stakeholders meeting to be held in early 2020. With his approval and support from many other areas of the County and State, from legislators and community organizers, the AACCW remained committed to seeing this effort to completion.

A future coordinating body will serve as the clearinghouse for the draft Anne Arundel County Human Trafficking Tip Sheet and Resource Guide that the AACCW drafted in 2019 based on samples from neighboring counties. We are continuing to work with Dr. Kai Boggess-de Bruin, who also attended our November meeting to further discuss this and other areas of work.

In 2019, the AACCW continued its community outreach work on human trafficking. In January, Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the AACCW promoted "Wear Blue Day" on January 11. The AACCW also co-sponsored and helped promote the Safe Cyber Presentation by an Anne Arundel County (Broadneck) School Resource Officer. Similarly, the AACCW organized the "Safe Surfing: Preventing Youth from Being Pulled Under by Sex Trafficking" presentation at the Glen Burnie library. The AACCW distributed the Deterra drug deactivation kits at both of these events.

In April 2019, the AACCW assisted with the planning and marketing of the annual Dash4Dignity 5K/1K race/walk and info expo at Heritage Community Church. In addition, several Commissioners volunteered at the event, which attracted nearly 200 runners and attendees and raised thousands of dollars for local organizations that help survivors. The AACCW also distributed the Deterra drug deactivation kits at this event.

In the second half of the year, the working group initiated collaboration with The Annapolis Chapter of Links, Inc., a youth group and made plans to hold a session on human trafficking for The Girls' Leadership Academy at Annapolis High School in January 2020. The working group

also fielded numerous requests from community service organizations relating to human trafficking, underscoring the need for a coordinating mechanism for enhanced and consistent information dissemination.

The working group also effectively used social media to further educate the community. The AACCW posted every Tuesday highlighting a different area of human trafficking, including Internet safety and labor trafficking through a robust information campaign via social media with hashtags #endtraffickingtuesday.

### **Women's & Girls' Leadership**

The underrepresentation of women, particularly minority women, at the highest political and executive levels is a persistent challenge in American life. By the end of 2018, interestingly, women held a supermajority of County Council seats and won several seats at the State level as well. The AACCW continued its support for education of, outreach to, and empowerment for women of every age.

The AACCW women's and girls' working group's mission is as follows:

- To improve the community by creating an inclusive environment of women that provides resources and leadership opportunities to empower all to reach their full potential.

In 2019, the AACCW's signature event was "The Women's List: Anne Arundel County Edition," held at the Crofton library in May. At the event, we showed "The Women's List" documentary and donated a copy to the library's circulating collection. This was followed by an inspirational and powerful panel discussion featuring several prominent women leaders in the County from all professional backgrounds:

- Amara Chaudhry, Poet & Activist
- Anne Colt Leitess, State's Attorney for Anne Arundel County
- Judge Elizabeth Morris, Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County
- Koren Ray, Founder & Designer, HOB0
- Elvia Thompson, Co-Founder, Annapolis Green
- Dr. Briana Walton, Director of Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery, Anne Arundel Medical Center
- Chief Trisha Wolford, Anne Arundel County Fire Department

The meeting room at the library was full with an estimated audience of 100 persons. The AACCW received many warm messages of thanks for such an empowering night of women's leadership and underscoring the message that women are important leaders in every field.

In 2019, the AACCW also attended the MPT Women's Leadership Forum event in Linthicum. This served as a touch point moment upon which the AACCW continued to build a relationship with the event organizer's leading to collaboration on a live video later in the year that reached nearly 2,000 people.

In May 2019, the AACCW attended the Maryland Women of Tomorrow Awards hosted by the Maryland Commission for Women, at which Anne Arundel County student Caitlyn Stachura was honored. Ms. Stachura was a regular attendee at AACCW meetings over the course of the 2018/2019 year and this association was instrumental in her application and award.

In June 2019, the AACCW spoke at the Leadership Anne Arundel Women's Executive Forum event in Annapolis, reaching a number of prominent community organizers and advocates who later followed up with the AACCW to collaborate on social media focused on women's mental health and surviving infant loss. This engagement was a result of many networking conversations with prominent women leaders in Anne Arundel County to introduce the AACCW to their networks.

The leadership at the Naval Medical Center in Annapolis invited the AACCW chair to speak at and attend as guest of honor at its Women's Equality Day event on August 26. The AACCW chair gave an overview of the Commission's role and work to the Naval personnel.

In September 2019, the Erin Levitas Foundation invited the AACCW to attend an event in Annapolis to raise funds to prevent sexual assault and support survivors needs. The Erin Levitas Foundation developed a school curriculum to teach consent and is working to integrate it into Maryland schools' curricula.

AACCW Commissioners also participated in the aforementioned the MLAW Fall Meeting to learn more about the bills coming before the Maryland General Assembly that will impact women and families. Three Commissioners also represented Anne Arundel County at the Statewide Commission for Women Roundtable Event, at which they networked and learned from other Commissions in the state. The Maryland Commission for Women also unveiled more detailed plans for the Centennial Celebration and Women's Leadership Conference to commemorate 100 years of Women's suffrage, which the AACCW promoted throughout the year and plans to attend in 2020.

In addition, one Commissioner coached for Girls on the Run, a ten-week program for girls in third through eighth grade designed to help them develop essential skills to navigate their world and establish a lifetime appreciation for health and fitness.

### **Opioid Epidemic**

The AACCW supported the County's efforts to prevent new users, educate the community on the use of naloxone, help individuals find and succeed in recovery, and regain their productive livelihoods. In 2019, the AACCW began to contemplate a more holistic recovery perspective and

planned to expand the focus of this group in 2020 to include all substance abuse and interlinked mental health concerns.

The AACCW opioid epidemic working group's current mission is as follows:

- As a community partner, we support innovative services and policies to de-stigmatize, educate, and prevent future crises related to the opioid epidemic in Anne Arundel County.

In February 2019, the AACCW hosted a naloxone (Narcan) training for its members, conducted by the Anne Arundel County Department of Health. The group engaged in an energetic and informative discussion regarding possible future directions for the County Health Department and a harm reduction lens to its efforts.

In September, the AACCW promoted and several Commissioners also participated in the Annapolis Recovery Walk 2019. The AACCW employed a robust social media campaign to enhance the #smashthestigma and #recoveryoutloud messages, along with informing residents about safe disposal of medicine and distributing the DeTerra medicine deactivation kits available from the County Department of Health.

In October 2019, Anne Arundel County citizen Ron Dennison attended an AACCW meeting to share about his organization, the Shannon C. Coffman Foundation. An AACCW Commissioner subsequently joined the board to provide networking and location scouting support for this newly formed 501(c)3 organization for a holistic long-term addiction recovery center for women in Anne Arundel County. The Commissioner also introduced Ron Dennison to Delegates and Senators at the annual legislative "ask night" for county organizations to present their work to the Anne Arundel County delegation.

## **THE YEAR AHEAD**

The AACCW ends the year in a robust position to consolidate gains in a number of areas of work, most notably advocating and organizing a County-wide stakeholders meeting on the topic of combatting human trafficking, reengaging on advocacy during the legislative session, and preparing for the Centennial Celebration to commemorate 100 years of women's suffrage. As many of the terms of current Commissioners are set to expire in 2020, membership may once again rise to the top of the priority list in the coming year.