

2021-2022

Washington State  
Women's Commission

# Biennial Report



WASHINGTON STATE  
WOMEN'S COMMISSION



The difference between a broken community and a thriving one is the presence of women who are valued.

- Michelle Obama

## Our Mission

The Washington State Women’s Commission aims to improve the life of every woman and girl in our state by ensuring equitable opportunities and removing systemic barriers through community engagement, advocacy, and public policy.

## Our Vision

Every woman and girl is healthy, safe, prosperous, and empowered to achieve their full potential and thriving.

## Our Mandate

The Women’s Commission is given the statutory authority, codified in RCW Ch. 43.119, to “address the reality that women face unique problems and needs...(and) address issues relevant to the problems and needs of women”.

## Our Approach

The Washington State Women’s Commission works to improve the life of every woman and girl—including women working in Washington State government—by ensuring equitable opportunities and removing systemic barriers, while being inclusive of our diverse populations. We achieve this by listening, amplifying, partnering, advocating, and mobilizing.

Listen



We listen to learn, understand, and empower women and girls.

Amplify



We connect the stories of women and girls with the people who need to hear them—such as people in positions of power.

Partner



We collaborate with and amplify the work of others, with the belief that our sum is greater than the individual parts.

Advocate



We are the voice of women and girls to advise the Governor and legislators.

Mobilize



We harness our collective superpowers, lived experiences, diverse perspectives, and networks.

As a diverse, bipartisan, multi-generational, and multi-issue organization, we exemplify diversity, equity, and inclusion.



# Who We Are

## Leadership

### Rituja Indapure

Chair of the  
Washington State Women's Commission

*"The global pandemic that started in 2020 disproportionately affected women at home and in the workplace. As we come out of the pandemic, the women of Washington state have inspired all of us by their resilience, resourcefulness and ingenuity. It is an honor and privilege to Chair the Washington State Women's Commission which is instrumental in documenting the reality of women's lives, and leading on protection and the empowerment of women's rights in the State of Washington."*



### Regina Malveaux, J.D.

Executive Director of the  
Washington State Women's Commission

*"The Washington State Women's Commission is proud to be the voice of women & girls in Washington, and to advocate on their behalf to the Governor's Office and the Legislature. It is an honor to lead a group of such impressive and dedicated women, committed to strengthening women's rights, dismantling systemic & structural barriers preventing the full participation of women in our society & economy, and ensuring that every woman and girl in Washington is able to thrive."*



# Who We Are

## Commissioners & Legislative Advisors

### Commissioners



**Rituja Indapure**  
**CHAIR**  
Engineering Manager  
Costco



**Michelle Merriweather**  
**PAST CHAIR**  
President & CEO  
Urban League of  
Metropolitan Seattle



**Dawn Rains**  
**VICE CHAIR**  
President  
Treehouse



**Quinn Dalan**  
**SECRETARY**  
Executive Director  
Yakima County  
Volunteer Attorney  
Services



**Anna Franklin**  
Chief Diversity, Equity  
& Inclusion Officer  
EWA/MT Providence



**Chris Kobdich**  
Director of Planning  
& Development  
Unity Care NW



**Vicki Lowe**  
Executive Director  
American Indian  
Health Commission  
for Washington State



**Riddhi Mukhopadhyay**  
Executive Director  
Sexual Violence  
Law Center



**Kasi Perreira**  
Director of Racial  
& Gender Justice  
Washington State  
Labor Council, AFL-CIO



**Ann Simons**  
Consultant

### Legislative Advisors



Representative  
Jamila Taylor (D)  
District 30



Representative  
Mary Dye (R)  
District 9



Senator  
Lisa Wellman (D)  
District 41



Senator  
Ann Rivers (R)  
District 18



I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.

- Audre Lorde

# Critical Issues Facing Women & Girls in Washington State

The Washington State Women’s Commission recognizes that women & girls in Washington State face unique challenges.

Every issue is a women’s issue. Yet some subjects affect women, and particularly BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) women, disproportionately. The Women’s Commission seeks to maximize its impact by focusing our efforts on three issue areas: health, safety, and economic security and opportunity.



Health



Safety



Economic Security  
& Opportunity



# Health

Access to quality, affordable health care is critical for the wellbeing of women & girls in Washington. Without it, our communities cannot thrive. Events of the past several years have highlighted the need to address systemic barriers in our health care system.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the importance of mental & behavioral health care. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v Jackson* decision undermined decades of hard-fought gains and legal precedent securing the rights of women & girls to reproductive autonomy and agency, requiring Washington State to seek to codify into law rights that were once thought of as guaranteed.

The Commission is working toward ensuring women and girls can live healthier lives by addressing the growing disparities in health equity, protecting the right to bodily autonomy, and advocating for the full funding of vital health services, including maternal, mental & behavioral health care.



## Abortion & Reproductive Rights

On June 24, 2022, the United States Supreme Court released its decision in *Dobbs v Jackson*, overturning the constitutional right to abortion, undermining decades of hard-fought and legal precedent securing our right to reproductive autonomy & agency.

Washington State has taken the lead in expanding and solidifying the rights of those capable of pregnancy. Abortion remains legal, and reproductive rights have been codified into law. Gov. Inslee has issued a directive which directs the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to refrain from cooperating or assisting with out-of-state abortion & other reproductive health care investigations, ensuring that WA State is a safe haven for those in neighboring states seeking abortion care. The Governor has also issued a call for a reproductive rights amendment to the State Constitution.

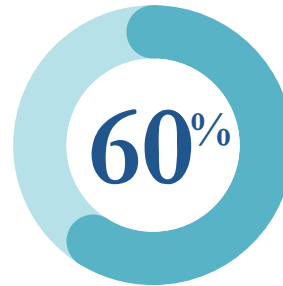


86% of reproductive aged women in Washington use contraception, highlighting Washington women's need for accessible and affordable reproductive care.

In the Institute for Women's Policy Research's 2022 "Reproductive Rights Index" Report, Washington ranks third in the country for women's reproductive rights.

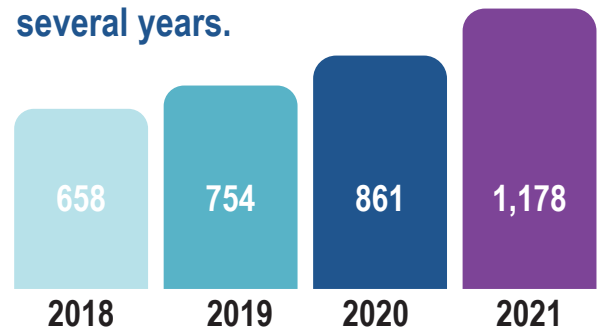


**1 in 4** women in the U.S. will have an abortion by the end of their childbearing years.



In their most recent Maternal Mortality Review (2019), the WA State Department of Health identified 30 pregnancy-related deaths from 2014 - 2016 in WA, and determined that 60% of those deaths were preventable.

**Maternal deaths in the U.S. have increased over the last several years.**



**135,000**

Washington women who received a mental health diagnosis in 2020.

65% of Washingtonians who received a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder or a depressive disorder in 2020 were women.





## Recommended Solutions

- Protecting reproductive rights & access to abortion services
- Funding reproductive healthcare access
- Supporting full funding of foundational public health services
- Addressing health inequities including improved mental health access for BIPOC and young women
- Enforce sex education requirements with inclusive, systematic, and effective curriculum

## Highlight

### Dear Sista, I See You: A Conversation About Supporting the Mental Health of Black Women

On Tuesday, March 22nd, 2022, the Washington State Women's Commission joined forces with the KD Hall Foundation and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, with support from Group Health Foundation to hold an event: "Dear Sista, I See You: A Conversation About Supporting the Mental Health of Black Women".

Convened at the WOW Gallery in Seattle, home to the iconic "Dear

Sista: I See You" exhibit, we brought together a group of dynamic Black women leaders from around Washington State and held three panel conversations around the topic of Black women's mental health — a crucial conversation in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the racial reckoning that followed in 2020.

Panelists shared their mental health journeys, discussed the need to destigmatize depression and mental health crises, and to dismantle the trope of the Strong Black Woman. They discussed the realities and impact of racial and gender-based trauma, and called for systemic and cultural changes necessary to normalize accessing support, and to promote healing and holistic well-being.





# Safety

Women and girls of all ages, income levels, racial and ethnic communities, sexual orientations, and gender identities experience violence in the form of domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, trafficking, and gun violence. Of particular concern is the disproportionate violence faced by BIPOC women & girls.

The women and girls of Washington deserve safety. The Commission is working with our community partners to find policy and practical solutions to these serious issues to help prevent violence, provide adequate services for survivors, and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence.

# Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls (MMIWG)

The Women's Commission is committed to increasing safety and access to justice for American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) women and girls by elevating awareness of the urgent human rights crisis, and listening to the women leading the Indigenous-led movement against it.

While organizations like the Urban Indian Health Institute have released some reports, more funding is needed to collect more data. Data is foundational to solving significant public health challenges. When we understand the who, what, when, where, and how associated with violence, we can focus on prevention.

**2nd**

Washington ranks 2nd in the nation for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Cases.

**45**

An Urban Indian Health Institute survey of 71 cities across the U.S. found 45 unique cases of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls in Seattle, the highest in the nation.

**6th**

The CDC estimates that murder is the 6th leading cause of death for Native women.

## Safety

View source data & more at [www.wswc.wa.gov/whats-new/reports/biennial-report-2021-2022](http://www.wswc.wa.gov/whats-new/reports/biennial-report-2021-2022)

**18%**

Domestic Violence is on the rise in Washington State. Domestic violence fatalities increased 18% in 2020.

Domestic violence survivors who receive "housing first" services reported lower rates of economic abuse than those who received services as usual.



**2747**

The number of clients that accessed sex trafficking and exploitation services in 2020-2021.

**89%**

The percentage of likely sex trafficking victims in Washington who reported that they were a juvenile at the time they were first exploited.

**More people are killed by guns than die in car accidents in Washington.**

**781**  
The number of Washingtonians who are killed each year by guns.

**5.3 Billion**  
Gun violence costs Washington state an average of \$5.3 billion every year.

**56%**  
The percentage of intimate partner homicides in WA that are carried out with a firearm. Perpetrators of domestic violence homicide in Washington use firearms more often than all other weapons combined.

**87%**  
Women account for 87 percent of intimate partner homicide victims in Washington.

## Recommended Solutions

- Funding for survivor services
- Establishing pathways to justice for gun violence victims
- Promoting victim-centered, trauma-informed responses in the legal system
- Supporting efforts to reduce gender-based violence against Indigenous women & girls

## Highlight

### Expanding Our Understanding Of Domestic Violence: Civil Protection Orders Listening Forum

In accordance with HB 1320, the Washington State Women’s Commission worked with the Gender & Justice Commission during the Fall of 2021 to develop recommendations related to access to civil protection orders. The Commission hosted a series of regional and virtual meetings to gather input from lawyers, community providers, and survivors on how to improve protection order proceedings for survivors.

The vast majority of stakeholders and survivors agreed that coercive control needed to be given more weight in legal proceedings regarding domestic violence and protective orders. In the words of one of the stakeholders that testified, *“We know that in relationships and domestic violence relationships, it doesn’t start out with the sexual assault. It doesn’t start out with the strangulation or the stalking. It starts with the coercive control. And by not including it, what we’re basically saying is that we’re allowing survivors to experience extreme trauma, and it has to rise to a certain level before we’ll even take it seriously. And there’s just so much that can be prevented if courts really included that.”*





# Economic Security & Opportunity

The Commission is dedicated to protecting and advancing economic security for Washington women, and reducing barriers to financial stability. Food security, financial assistance, access to childcare as well as employment and educational opportunities are all central to women's economic equality.

The Commission is equally dedicated to promoting economic opportunity for all Washington women, advocating for workforce development, gender equity in leadership positions, and the closing of the pay equity gap, which affects BIPOC women most egregiously.

The Women's Commission seeks to alleviate the disproportionate economic burden associated with the "Motherhood Penalty", working to address the barriers that prevent mothers in particular from advancing in the workplace due to issues including childcare affordability and accessibility, and closing the opportunity gap.

## The Motherhood Penalty

*Noun; The phenomenon by which women's pay decreases once they become mothers.*

*Due to the Motherhood Penalty, mothers make 73 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.*

Women are the sole or primary breadwinner in 41% of American households with children. Nonetheless, women's earnings - as well as their earning potential - often decrease significantly when they become moms. A study by Census Bureau researchers found that between two years before the birth of a couple's first child and a year after, the earnings gap between opposite-sex spouses doubles.

Data shows that several factors lead to this phenomenon, including:

- Hiring managers are less likely to hire mothers compared to women who don't have children, and when employers do make an offer to a mother, they may offer her a lower salary than they do other women.
- Women are more likely than men to take time away from the workforce or to reduce their work hours because of caregiving responsibilities.
- Many employers don't offer necessary benefits such as paid parental leave, caregiving leave or flexible work schedules that could make it easier for working spouses to share domestic responsibilities and to blend their work and family life.
- The unreasonably high cost of childcare pushes many women out of the workforce, particularly low-wage women whose earnings would barely offset the bill for day care or a babysitter.



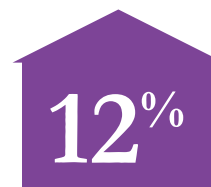
**The year at which the gender wage gap will close in WA State at the current rate of progress.**

According to a 2018 study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Black and Latina women in the U.S. earn less than their White counterparts but are more likely to be the primary wage earner in their family.



In Washington State it's estimated that over 300K families with children aged birth-5 need childcare. As of March of 2021, only 34% of those children are enrolled in licensed child care or preschool.

**1 in 10**  
U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2021.



Food stamp use in Washington state grew 12% during the pandemic, with a majority of those participants being women and children.



## Recommended Solutions

- Promoting education and employment opportunities for women
- Alleviating the disproportionate economic burden placed on mothers (aka "The Motherhood Penalty"), including issues pertaining to pay equity, workforce flexibility, childcare, and the opportunity gap
- Ensuring equitable access to affordable, high-quality childcare
- Addressing housing & homelessness
- Supporting measures to equalize access to SNAP and WIC benefits, preferably to use benefits online.
- Promoting the implementation of Women on Corporate Boards legislation passed with Women's Commission support in 2020

## Highlight

### The Pandemic's Toll on Latinas: A Conversation with Latina Leaders in WA State

Research, grounded in the personal stories of women across the nation, has overwhelmingly shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated underlying systemic inequities. On April 21, 2022, the Washington State Women's Commission co-hosted, with the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, a conversation with Latina leaders across the state.

In Washington State, a study conducted by the University of Washington's School of Social Work's Latino Center for Health echoed national findings that the Latinx community had experienced significantly higher job loss and decreased economic security compared to their white counterparts, with Latinas the hardest hit.

In the words of Irasema Garza, J.D., lead author of the AAUW study: "As we rebuild from the pandemic, we must lift up Latina voices." Latinas, making up a large portion of the nation's essential workforce, are a "vital base of support to our nation; their success and that of the U.S. are inextricably linked."





Hear me as a woman.  
Have me as your sister.  
On purpled battlefield  
breaking day,  
So I might say our  
victory is just beginning,  
See me as change,  
Say I am movement,  
That I am the year,  
and I am the era  
of the women.

- Amanda Gorman

# Listening Sessions

Before the Commission can advocate on behalf of women and girls across the state, we gather information from women and girls about what is most important to them, what their priorities are, and what barriers they face. By hosting listening sessions, we're able to learn, understand, and advocate.

## Latina Women Listening Session, Quincy, WA

Women's Commission staff and Commissioners were thrilled to have the opportunity to travel to Quincy, WA to hear from leaders in the community. The session included presentations from community leaders on topics including healthcare, worker's rights, and the specific opportunities and challenges faced by Latina women and their families.



## Young Women's Listening Series

In the fall of 2022, the Commission held a series of 6 listening sessions across the state, focusing on young women ages 16 to 30. Facilitated by our Fall 2022 Policy Fellow and Communications Intern, we heard from young women about what challenges they face and what inspires them. The findings of the series will be released in a report in early 2023.



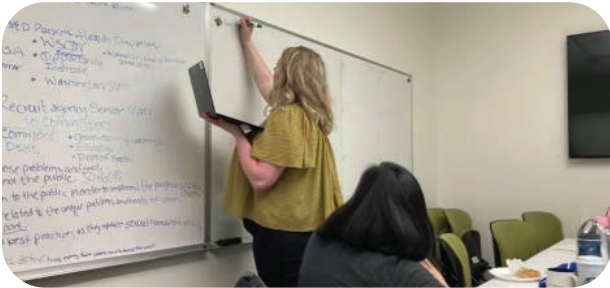
## Washington State Patrol

In the spring of 2022, the Women's Commission was tasked by the Governor's office with hosting a listening session for female employees of the Washington State Patrol (WSP). As part of the 30 x 30 Initiative, a nationwide effort to increase the percentage of women in policing, we heard from current WSP female employees about what challenges they face, and what opportunities they see to increase the recruitment, promotion, and retention of female employees.



# Strategic Plan

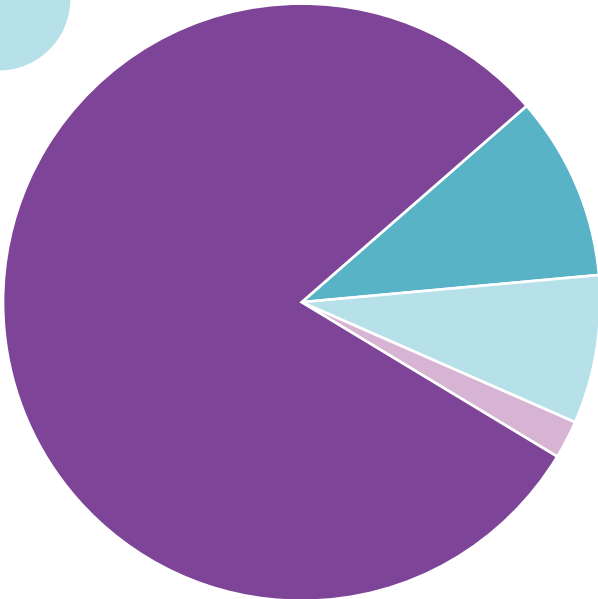
Over two sessions in the Summer of 2022, Commissioners were able to gather in person to reflect on the first four years of the Women's Commission and to develop a Strategic Plan for the next two years. Hosted by Commissioner Vicki Lowe at the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Center in Sequim, Commissioners & staff were also able to spend time learning about the Traditional Foods Program.



# Budget

Total Budget:  
\$484,626

80%  
Staffing\*



10%  
Facilities, IT, and  
Legal Services

8%  
Commissioner and  
Community Outreach  
Travel

2%  
Supplies, Misc

# Policy Agenda

## Securing Critical Access To Women's Healthcare

- Protecting reproductive rights & access to abortion services
- Funding reproductive healthcare access
- Supporting full funding of foundational public health services
- Addressing health inequities including improved mental health access for BIPOC and young women



## Ensuring Safety For All Women

- Funding for survivor services
- Establishing pathways to justice for gun violence victims
- Promoting victim-centered, trauma-informed responses in the legal system
- Supporting efforts to reduce gender-based violence against Indigenous women & girls



## Promoting Economic Security & Economic Opportunity for All Women

- Alleviating the disproportionate economic burden placed on mothers (aka "The Motherhood Penalty"), including issues pertaining to pay equity, workforce flexibility, childcare, and the opportunity gap
- Ensuring equitable access to affordable, high-quality childcare
- Addressing housing & homelessness
- Promoting the implementation of Women on Corporate Boards legislation passed with Women's Commission support in 2020





Design by Erica Schreiber.