

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023



ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SINCE 1972

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ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

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Commissioners:

Arlinda J. Clark, Esq., Chair
Isabel Argoti, First Vice Chair
Lindsey Turnbull, Second Vice-Chair
Elizabeth (Liz) Richards, Secretary
LaDonna King, At Large
Ijeoma Enendu
Betty Romero
Janet LaValle
Tondalayo Royster
Kimberly Y. Mouzon
Jodi Danis
Helene Meister
Tonja G. Paylor
Kathy Estrada

Team Members:

Executive Director: Jodi Finkelstein, MSW
Program Manager: Carmen Kaarid, MSW
MSW intern: Jennifer Escobar, University of Maryland
School of Social Work

Summer interns: Liam Darnell, rising junior, Walt Whitman High School,
Diana Renderos, rising senior, Montgomery Blair High School and Hannah
Mullins, rising sophomore, Walt Whitman High School.



Message From The Chair Donna Rojas

As I concluded my final term as Chairperson of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, I can reflect on FY23 with immense gratitude for the extraordinary progress the Commission for Women has made. This year was a transformative year for the Commission for Women. We finally expanded our reach, launched new initiatives, and strengthened our impact outside COVID-19. I am proud to present the FY23 Annual Report, which showcases our commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women in our community.

Our mission to empower women has driven our efforts and inspired our continued and new programming. This year, we have reached new rights in advocacy, support services, and community engagement. Additional highlights were:

- Another successful virtual Women's Legislative Briefing with the theme "Empowered Women Protect Democracy."
- Girl Power contest was a huge hit, with the question being, "Now that we have six women on our County Council, what advice would you give them to ensure our community is a place where women and girls can feel safe and engaged?"
- The Policy and Legislative Committee conducted its annual Lobby Day online, advocating for the following policies:
 - Repeal of Marriage as a Defense to Sex Crimes—Love is No Defense
 - Child Care Sustainability Act
 - Child Abuse and Neglect—Definition of Neglect
 - Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth
- The Commission celebrated and honored women at the Women Making History Awards with the Montgomery Women in person.
- The Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation committee completed a 3-5-year strategic plan.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our 15-member Commission, the executive director, and her dedicated team, and the support of the county executive and council. Being in this role has been one of my greatest honors, and I am immensely proud of what the Commission has achieved together over the past six years. As I step down, I do so with a heart full of hope and optimism. I am committed to the Commission's work and look forward to its continued success.



Executive Director's Report Jodi Finkelstein, MSW

Since our founding in 1972, the Montgomery County Commission for Women has worked to make our communities safe and equitable environments for women and girls. This year, we have moved forward with that goal through several programs, seminars, and legislative projects which are highlighted throughout this review.

This past year we continued to serve the community through self-defense seminars, which we are happy to say are back in person and included an all-Spanish class for the first time. Our other seminars remain online as we have found that more people are able to attend and have become more accessible. This included our 43rd Women's Legislative Briefing whereby close to 500 people attended and covered robust conversations about women's health and safety, supporting women's businesses, and access to affordable housing.

The Commission's legislative advocacy initiatives were also successful this past year, as all four priority bills passed the Maryland General Assembly. Topics included sexual assault, human trafficking, childcare, and reproductive health. Advocacy efforts included written testimony and an online lobby day which was held in December.

In addition to focusing on our programs and advocacy, the Commission continued to build our internship program. The leadership pipeline is important to the Commission which is why we work with high school, college, and graduate-level interns. We were pleased to continue our partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work and are thrilled that three of our former University of Maryland School of Social Work interns are now employed with the Montgomery County Government.

I continue to be optimistic and excited as we continue to advocate for positive change in Montgomery County. I would like to thank our supporters and constituents for making all this vital and impactful work possible.

With this, I'm pleased to highlight the work of the Commission from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, in the following pages.

Emerging Leaders Committee

Co-Chairs: Isabel Argoti and Lindsey Turnbull

The Emerging Leaders (EL) Committee focused on two projects this year: the Girl Power Contest and the Emerging Leaders Track of the Women's Legislative Briefing.

Emerging Leaders and the Women's Legislative Briefing (WLB):

The Committee was pleased to offer Student Service-Learning (SSL) hours again this year. Students who participated in the Emerging Leaders session and followed specific guidelines were eligible for up to three SSL hours. Students participated in two seminars:

1. Feeling Safe Everywhere: Home, School, Community
2. How to Express My Mental Health

Forty-three middle and high schoolers registered for the online event.

After the sessions, students were asked to fill out a survey and share their thoughts about the EL sessions. Students were asked, "What was your biggest takeaway from the Emerging Leaders/WLB event?" Below are a few responses:

"My biggest takeaway was that we can all be leaders one day if we just start with trying to make a difference."

"I learned about how things work, like why we have securities at our school and why there are strict rules. And also mental health and how to feel less stressed before a special event."

The Commission would like to thank Patricia Prather for her hard work serving as Chair of the EL track.

The EL speaker at the WLB was Ethan Schenker, a senior at Walt Whitman High School and a former CFW intern.

2023 Girl Power Contest:

The sixth annual Girl Power Contest took place March 1–March 31. The contest celebrated Women’s History Month by asking participants to answer a question related to women and girls. Participants entered a song, poem, picture—anything creative—that answers the question posed. The question for March 2023 was:

We now have six women on the Montgomery County Council. What advice would you give them to make sure our community is a place where women and girls can feel safe and encouraged?

Winners were announced via press release and social media in May 2023.

6TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH
2023 GIRL POWER CONTEST

Submit a short story, poem, drawing, or medium of their choice that addresses this question:

We now have 6 women on the County Council! What advice would you give them to make sure our community is a place where women and girls can feel safe and encouraged?

Entries must be submitted by Friday, March 31.

Questions? Email cfwinfo@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 240-777-8300
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw>

March 1st - 31st
Entries are due midnight on March 31, 2023

Contest is open to all, ages 5 and up

Enter Today!

MC Montgomery County PL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

friends OF THE LIBRARY MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

2023 GIRL POWER CONTEST WINNERS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MIDDLE SCHOOL
First Place: Colette Jaksic	First Place: Mya Twyman
Honorable Mention: Morgan Alexis Johnson	Honorable Mention: Marilyn Zhang
HIGH SCHOOL	ADULT
First Place: Morgen Thompson	First Place: Natalie Jean
Honorable Mention: Daniela Martinez	Honorable Mention: Natasha Shangold

MC Montgomery County PL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Montgomery County Commission for Women 2023 Women's Legislative Briefing

Chair: Arlinda J. Clark, Esq.

Members: Donna Rojas, Helene Meister, Janet LaValle, Jodi Danis, Kimberly Mouzon, and Liz Richards

The 43rd annual Women's Legislative Briefing (WLB) was held on Sunday, January 29, 2023. The briefing was once again held online to ensure everyone's health and safety due to COVID-19 concerns. Video greetings were sent from numerous elected officials, including Maryland Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen; Maryland Congressmen John Sarbanes, C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, David Trone, and Jamie Raskin; Maryland Lt. Governor Aruna Miller; County Executives Marc Elrich (Montgomery County), Angela Alsobrooks (Prince George's County) and Jessica Fitzwater (Frederick); and Montgomery County Council President Evan Glass.

The theme was "Empowered Women Protect Democracy." The opening session, "Women Who Empower Through Advocacy," was moderated by Adrianna Hopkins, a news anchor from WJLA ABC 7. The other panelists included:

- Virginia Kase Solomón, CEO, League of Women Voters
- DeAnna Hoskins, CEO, JustLeadershipUSA
- Susan Jin Davis, Social Impact Officer, Al Roker Entertainment

Their national viewpoints provided a unique perspective of how empowerment looks throughout the United States and how advocacy can lead to a career in many fields.

This panel set the tone for the rest of the conference, which included four breakout sessions:

- Empowerment Through Health
- Empowerment Through Safety
- Empowerment Through Economic Justice
- Empowerment Through Education

Approximately 500 individuals attended the briefing from throughout Maryland. Feedback from participants was exceptionally positive and included comments such as:

"This is the best event of the year for women. Empowers and teaches advocacy. The discussions are phenomenal. So much diversity of all kinds, allowing us to exchange our issues and needs."

"I felt that the opportunities for discussion and networking were excellent. There were a lot of experts who shared valuable insight and information."

"The speakers were great, and the information shared gave tools and tips for staying informed and becoming part of the movement to serve, build, and gather!"

Montgomery County Commission for Women 2023 Women's Legislative Briefing

The WLB was made possible by nearly 50 community sponsors, including major sponsors such as Kaiser Permanente, AARP Maryland, The Universities at Shady Grove, and Montgomery College.

The Women's Legislative Briefing included a Chair's Networking Reception, which was held in person on Saturday, January 28, at the Silver Spring Civic Building.

Over 60 attendees from sponsoring organizations discussed how their organizations are addressing issues such as education, health, safety, and economic justice. Michele Jawando served as the keynote speaker for the event.



Reception Program

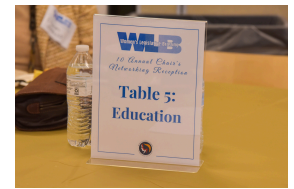


Attendee Gifts

(L to R) WLB Chair Arlinda J. Clark, Esq., Keynote speaker Michele Jawando and CFW Chair Donna Rojas



Chair's Networking Reception Attendees



Policy and Legislative Committee (PALS)

Chairs: Donna Rojas and Jodi Finkelstein

Members: Arlinda Clark, Betty Romero, Tondalayo Royster, Liz Richards, and Janet LaValle

The Policy and Legislative Committee continued its robust roster of advocacy activities by hosting its fifth Annual Lobby Day for current and past Commissioners on December 15, 2022. The Lobby Day was held on Zoom because of COVID-19. Delegate Lesley Lopez (D-39) served as our keynote speaker and kicked off the event with an inspirational address.

We were also joined by Senator Will Smith (D-20), Senator Susan Lee (D-16), Senator Benjamin Kramer (D-19), Senator Brian Feldman (D-15), Delegate Emily Shetty (D-18), Delegate Anne Kaiser (D-14), and Delegate Ariana Kelly (D-16).

The Committee focused on four legislative priorities: (1) Repeal of Marriage as a Defense to Sex Crimes – Love is No Defense, (2) Child Care Sustainability Act, (3) Child Abuse and Neglect – Definition of Neglect, (4) Safe Harbor. Each priority bill was selected in accordance with the full Commission's priorities – women's economic empowerment, safety and security, health, and women in leadership.

Due to COVID-19, Commissioners were only able to submit written testimony on bills, as verbal testimony was reserved for delegates/senators sponsoring bills and selected individuals and groups. Despite these limitations, the Committee and Commission:

- **Conducted Social Media Outreach to Increase Awareness and Action:** Twitter and Facebook were used to inform the community about the substance and progress of the priority issues and our positions on them.
- **Sent Action Alerts:** Action Alerts were sent via the e-newsletter, which is distributed to more than 20,000 people. These alerts described the priority bills, the issues they address, and actions that needed to be taken by the community to affect the legislative process.
- **VIRTUAL Lobby Day:** Montgomery County legislators were invited to participate in the 5th annual lobby day to discuss priority issues for the upcoming Maryland General Assembly session.

Members of the Committee picked a bill to champion, which meant that each Commissioner was responsible for writing and submitting testimony and providing background on the bill during lobby day.

Champions included:

- Repeal of Marriage as a Defense to Sex Crimes—Love is No Defense: Tondalayo Royster
- Child Care Sustainability Act: Betty Romero
- Child Abuse and Neglect—Definition of Neglect: Tondalayo Royster
- Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth: Donna Rojas

Policy and Legislative Committee (PALS)

MGA 2023

ALL CFW PRIORITY BILLS PASSED

01

HB0004/SB0129 CRIMINAL LAW - SEXUAL CRIMES - REPEAL OF SPOUSAL DEFENSE

Sexual Assault disproportionately affects women. HB4 and SB129 seek to repeal the current statute that makes marriage a defense to some sex crimes by repealing Criminal Law §3-318

02

HB0297/SB0292 CRIMINAL LAW - VICTIMS OF CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING - SAFE HARBOR AND SERVICE RESPONSE

Most sex trafficking victims are women and girls. HB297 and SB292 would provide a safe harbor for child victims of sex trafficking and prevent criminalization for acts they committed as a result of their trafficking including prostitution and other related offenses

03

HB0495/SB0350 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT - CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - ALTERATIONS

Without childcare, women often struggle to re-enter the job market. HB495 and SB350 seek to sustain the investments in the Child Care Scholarship Program, which helps parents enter and remain in the workforce by subsidizing the high cost of childcare.

04

HB0705/SB0798 DECLARATION OF RIGHTS - RIGHT TO REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

HB705 and SB798 would enable a ballot measure to constitutionally preserve the rights of Marylanders to make decisions and choices regarding their own reproduction.

Montgomery County Commission for Women



Programming Committee

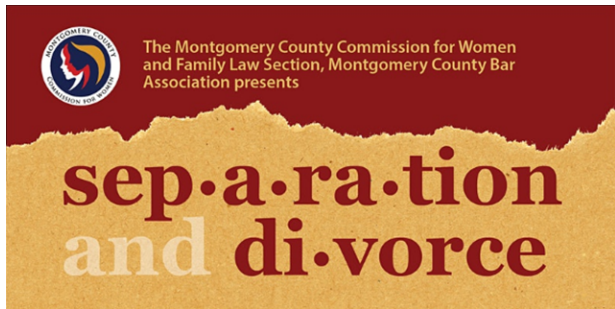
Chair: Ijeoma Enendu

Members: Donna Rojas, Janet LaValle, and Kimberly Mouzon

In addition to the regular programming listed below, the Committee partnered with Montgomery Women to celebrate Women's History Month by celebrating women "making history" in the community. We highlighted 31 women "herstory makers" in Montgomery County and showcased one a day for the entirety of March. The celebration cumulated in an in-person event on March 16 at the Silver Spring Civic Building, where we honored our "herstory makers", and attendees heard from a panel of women history-makers who shared their path to success and their insight on how to inspire others to create change.



Programming



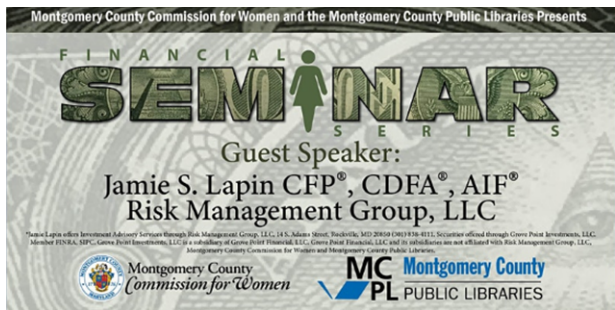
Separation and Divorce: What Do I Need to Know?

The Commission partnered with the Montgomery County Bar Association, Family Law Section again to provide free seminars on the "ins" and "outs" of separation and divorce in Maryland. Participants learned about the (1) Methods of Dispute Resolution, (2) When and Where to File, (3) Types of Divorce and Grounds, (4) Financial Statements, Alimony, Property, and Equitable Distribution, (5) the Role of the Attorney, and (6) Domestic Violence/Orders of Protection. Seminars were held virtually on the first Wednesday of every month from 7-8:30 p.m., from October through June.



Introductory Self-Defense Seminar:

This two-hour introductory self-defense seminar provided teen & adult women of all fitness levels with information that may reduce their risk of exposure to violence. It introduced them to the physical aspects of self-defense. Classes were held in person on October 4, 2022, October 27, 2022, November 8, 2022, November 22, 2022, December 8, 2022, February 20, 2023, March 18, 2023, March 22, 2023, March 28, 2023, April 5, 2023, and June 10, 2023. A class was held in Spanish on June 13, 2023. Classes were \$12 and were held at various library and recreation centers across the county.



Financial Health & Wellness Series:

Montgomery County Public Libraries partnered with the Commission to offer a series of financial seminars that walked participants through "all things" money. Topics included Financial Planning 101, Planning for Retirement, Social Security and Medicare, and Divorce and Money. The series ran on November 9, 2022, November 16, 2022, November 30, 2022, December 7, 2022, May 2, 2023, May 9, 2023, May 16, 2023, and May 23, 2023. The seminars were free and offered virtually through Zoom.



R.A.D. for Women Basic Physical Defense 6-week Course:

A 12-hour, six-week course for women, and was taught by R.A.D. certified self-defense instructors. It included risk reduction strategies, realistic hands-on self-defense skills practical for women of all abilities, and an optional simulation where participants suit up in protective gear and practice their skills live in a safe training environment. A reference manual and a LIFETIME free return and practice policy were included for all students who finished the course. The course cost \$60 and was held at Nancy H. Dacek North Potomac Community Recreation Center.



A Virtual Career Exploration for Her:

Hosted in partnership with Montgomery Women, this free virtual career guidance session on November 17, 2022, provided middle and high school female students the opportunity to begin exploring careers of their interest that are non-traditional for women. Participants were able to meet women in non-traditional careers who provided insights into the reality of their careers. Students earned 2 SSL hours for participating in the event.

Public Relations Committee

Chair: Isabel Argoti

Members: Arlinda Clark, Kimberly Mouzon, Betty Romero, Lindsey Turnbull, and LaDonna King

Public Relations Committee members are responsible for providing guidance on the promotion of CFW programs and events. The committee continued to publicize Commission for Women events, programs, and overall activities of the Commission on social media, this includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and our weekly newsletter. The CFW weekly newsletter is sent every Friday afternoon and reached 20,000 people.

The committee also had the opportunity to participate in several community events where Commissioners tabled and promoted the work and programs of the Commission directly to community members.

In addition, the Commission was honored with several proclamations from the County Executive and the County Council in recognition of our various causes and priorities.



(From left to right): Executive Director Jodi Finkelstein and Commissioner Tondalayo Royster at the Montgomery County Council's Teen Dating Awareness Month Proclamation.



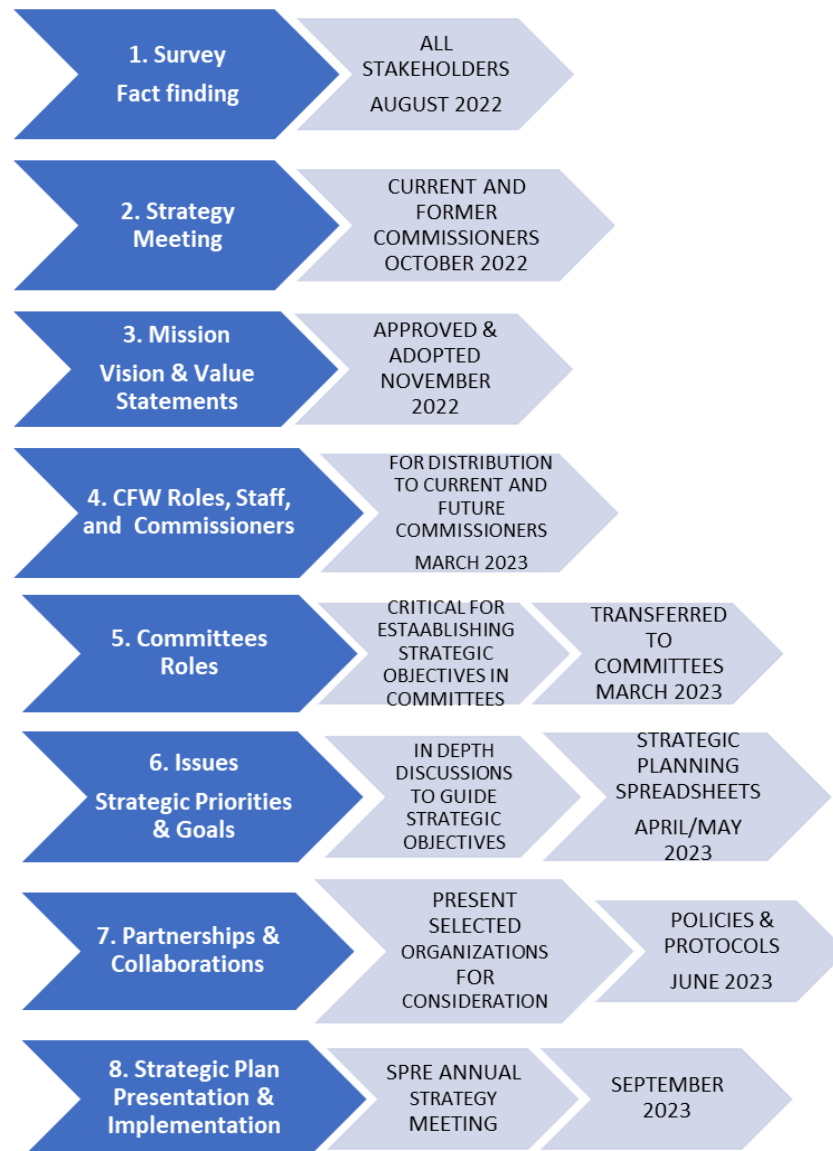
(From left to right): Commissioner Betty Romero, Commissioner and Chair Donna Rojas, Commissioner Helene Meister, Commissioner Isabel Argoti, and Executive Director Jodi Finkelstein at the Montgomery County Council's International Women's Day Proclamation.

Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation Committee (SPRE)

Chair: Betty Romero

Committee Members: Arlinda Clark, Tondalayo Royster, Liz Richards, Jodi Danis, Lindsey Turnbull, LaDonna King, Isabel Argoti, Helene Meister, Ijeoma Enendu, Kimberly Mouzon, Janet LaValle, Kathy Estrada, and Tonja Paylor

This past fiscal year was extremely busy and productive for the committee. Unlike previous years, the committee focused on completing a 3–5-year strategic plan that could be edited and reviewed each year. The timeline below highlights their work:



The Commission, through the SPRE committee, created strategic priorities and focus areas which included:

Equity in Women's Economic and Financial Issues

Equity in Women's Leadership, Education, and Workforce Issues

Equity in Women's Health, Safety, and Security Issues

Priorities

- 1 Increase Financial Literacy
- 2 Alleviate the burden of caregiving for older and younger people
- 3 Promote and support women in leadership positions
- 4 Promote and support young women to pursue education and careers in STEM
- 5 Promote equal access to healthcare
- 6 Increase safety knowledge and awareness

In choosing the priorities and goals, they collectively agreed that each needed to be:

- Specific
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Measurable
- Timely



POTENTIAL GOALS INCLUDED:

Goal One:

Expand access and understanding of financial fundamentals for women and girls

Goal Two:

Expand access to quality, affordable, and reliable care

Goal Three:

Increase women's voter engagement

Goal Four:

Increase inclusion and representation in public office, elected positions, boards, and commissions

Goal Five:

Providing tools and networking connections

Goal Six:

Preventive care to promote wellness, avoid crisis, and decrease the financial burden

Goal Seven:

Sexual and reproductive health - maternal/infant health

Goal Eight:

Safety toolkit - Apps and helplines

Goal Nine:

Safe neighborhoods and workplaces

Liaison Accomplishments

Respectfest

Liaison: Kimberly Mouzon

RespectFEST

RespectFest is a virtual and in-person festival for youth aimed at raising awareness to reduce the rates of teen dating violence and provide education on healthy relationships and consent.

A virtual RespectFest 2023 was held April 10–April 14. Virtual events included workshops and webinars geared towards parents and students. Respectfest was also held in person on April 16 at the Wheaton Community Recreation Center, where over 600 individuals attended. The Montgomery County Commission for Women hosted a table where individuals could participate in activities that centered on helping parents talk to their children about teen dating violence.

The CFW liaison also served as a judge in the Choose Respect Montgomery Video Contest. The contest raises awareness on the issue of teen dating violence, both through the creation of public service announcements as well as the distribution of the PSAs on social media in the schools. Students who followed contest rules received 10 student service-learning hours.



Montgomery College Scholarship

Liaison: Isabel Argoti



The Commission, in conjunction with the Montgomery College Foundation established a STEM Scholarship to support students pursuing careers in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The \$10,500 endowment, funded by individual gifts, will support current Montgomery College students now and in the future.

In Fall 2022, three students were recipients of the CFW's scholarship: Ester Gadelha, Behnam Alimohammadinafchi, and Christian Balmoris.

The impact of this scholarship can best be described by the students:

"It gives me solace to know that there are people out there willing to help and lessen the burden that many of us college students experience year after year... I want to make clear my level of gratitude towards everyone at the Montgomery County Commission for Women, as I know time is a valuable finite resource, and to spend that precious time on someone like me is worth more than the scholarship itself." ~ Christian Balmoris

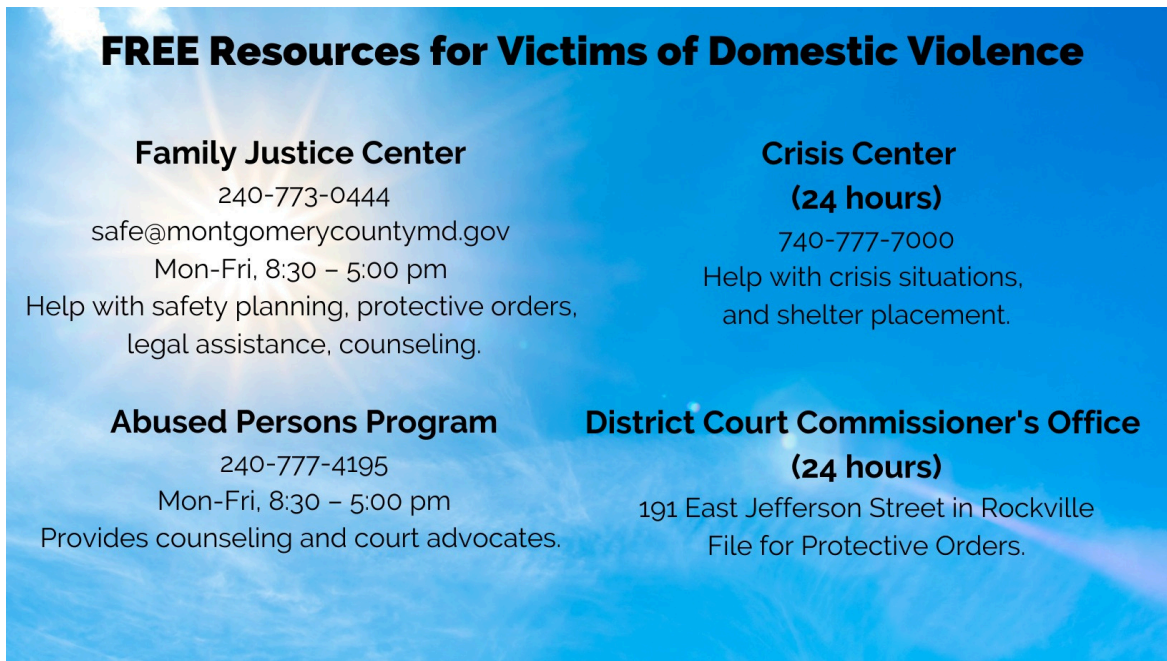
"I am delighted and honored to receive Commission for Women STEM Endowed Scholarship... I am keen to pursue my passion and curiosity for nuclear engineering. My sister inspired me to pursue this major. In 2012 and 2018, my sister was diagnosed with central neurocytoma, a rare brain tumor successfully removed in 2018. I plan to study the selected major to help individuals like my sister. I am grateful for your generosity that allows me to pursue my education and focus on my goal." ~ Ester Gadelha

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Liaison: Tondalayo Royster

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) was established by the Montgomery County Council in 2006 with the mission of reducing the incidence of domestic violence and creating a safe community for families to live free of abuse.

The nineteen-member board is comprised of six public members, two representatives from non-governmental or non-profit domestic violence service or advocacy organizations and eleven agency representatives of the County and State government who coordinate efforts relating to domestic violence prevention and safety. The CFW's executive director is an appointed member to the DVCC. The executive director may send a designee in his/her stead. A full list of DVCC accomplishments can be found in their [annual report](#).



FREE Resources for Victims of Domestic Violence

<p>Family Justice Center 240-773-0444 safe@montgomerycountymd.gov Mon-Fri, 8:30 – 5:00 pm Help with safety planning, protective orders, legal assistance, counseling.</p>	<p>Crisis Center (24 hours) 740-777-7000 Help with crisis situations, and shelter placement.</p>
<p>Abused Persons Program 240-777-4195 Mon-Fri, 8:30 – 5:00 pm Provides counseling and court advocates.</p>	<p>District Court Commissioner's Office (24 hours) 191 East Jefferson Street in Rockville File for Protective Orders.</p>