

The Cook County Commission on Women's Issues

ANNUAL REPORT 2005-2006



Peggy A. Montes, Chairperson

Todd H. Stroger, President
Cook County Board of Commissioners

The Cook County Commission on Women's Issues

The Cook County Commission on Women's Issues was created by resolution of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and first appointed by President John H. Stroger, Jr. in October of 1995. The Commission is composed of seventeen women of various racial, economic, ethnic, and occupational backgrounds from across Cook County.

The Commission is charged with ensuring women's issues and perspectives are considered in the formation of public policy in Cook County. To that end, the Commission is authorized to advise the president and members of the Cook County Board on ways to promote the status of women in county government, improve the delivery of County services to women and their families, and eliminate inequities in laws, practices and conditions which have an impact on Cook County women.

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Dear President Stroger, Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and Friends,

Throughout the last two years, the Commission continued its work by focusing on both the persistent concerns affecting the health, safety and economic well-being of the women and girls of Cook County, as well as emerging and overlooked issues facing those women and girls.

In 2005, the Commission forged a new partnership with the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation to increase public awareness about the Abandoned Newborn Protection Act. This law allows a parent to anonymously relinquish her or his newborn infant to a designated safe haven without fear of prosecution and, in doing so, save lives.

The Commission continued its research and advocacy for girls in, and at risk for, involvement in the Cook County juvenile justice system. The Commission helped organize the annual JUST US GIRLS HEALTH CONFERENCE which provided free workshops and activities on self-esteem, healthy relationships and positive body image for approximately 300 girls across Cook County. In August of 2006, the Commission released a report on the subject of Girl Violence and Aggression, highlights of which are included in this report.

The Commission updated the County's domestic violence workplace policy. The revised policy, adopted by the County Board in January of 2006, brings the County's

original, model policy into compliance with the Illinois Victim's Economic and Security Act, a subsequently enacted state law that protects victims of domestic and sexual violence against workplace discrimination.

The foregoing projects and other activities of the Commission are outlined in this report. In reading this report, it will be apparent that the Commission found its work richly enhanced by the many collaborations and partnerships it has fostered with an array of individuals, other government agencies, private non-profits and academic organizations.

We thank the appointed members of the Women's Commission who generously volunteer their time and energy to this important work. We are particularly grateful for the commitment, wisdom and professionalism of the Commission's Research Associate, Dr. Eva Mika. Finally, we thank the members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners for their ongoing support of the Commission and its work. We look forward to our future work with, and on behalf of, the women and girls of Cook County.

Sincerely,

Peggy A. Montes
Chairperson

Jennifer D. Vidis
Executive Director

ABANDONED NEWBORN PROTECTION ACT

In 2005, the Commission forged a new partnership with the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation to protect the most vulnerable of its county's constituents: its infants. According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 32 to 34 infants were found abandoned each year from 1997-1999, and, of these, approximately 20 infants were abandoned within the first 24 hours of life. The Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act was signed into law on August 17, 2001, with the goal of preventing the deaths of abandoned newborn infants by providing parents with a responsible, safe mechanism to relinquish a newborn.

The Abandoned Newborn Protection Act allows a parent to anonymously relinquish her or his newborn infant to the care and custody of a safe haven. The law provides immunity from prosecution for parents who relinquish their unharmed newborn to a safe haven within seven days of the birth. Designated safe havens are hospitals, emergency medical facilities, and staffed fire or police stations. Newborn infants will be given a medical examination and the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services will be contacted to facilitate a private adoption within three days.

The success of this important law depends on increased public awareness. At the urging of the Commission on Women's Issues, the Cook County Board of Commissioners proclaimed the week of September 19, 2005 SAVE ABANDONED BABIES WEEK in Cook County. Hospitals, emergency medical facilities, fire stations and police

stations were contacted and encouraged to post and distribute information regarding the Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act so that all Illinois residents become aware of how parents can safely relinquish a newborn infant and save lives.

In 2006, the Commission joined in successfully advocating for an amendment to the Abandoned Newborn Protection Act which extended the time during which a parent can legally relinquish a newborn infant from 72 hours to 7 days.

Free posters, brochures, and other promotional materials can be downloaded from the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation's website at www.saveabandonedbabies.org or by contacting:

Save Abandoned Babies Foundation
info@saveabandonedbabies.org
Tel: (312) 440-0229
Fax: (312) 400-0805
55 E. Erie Street #2905
Chicago, IL 60611

THE COOK COUNTY DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE WORKPLACE POLICY

On January 18, 2006, the Cook County Board adopted a revised domestic and sexual violence workplace policy to bring it into compliance with the Illinois Victim's Economic and Security Act "VESSA." The revised policy, drafted by the Commission on Women's Issues, updated the original, model policy developed by the Commission to address the effects of domestic violence on the workplace and provide support to victims of such violence. VESSA, enacted subsequent to the County's original policy, created state law protections for victims of domestic and sexual violence against workplace discrimination and provides employees who are victims of domestic or sexual violence, or who have a family or household member who are victims of domestic or sexual violence, with up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave. The state protections are now a part of the County's policy.

Domestic and sexual violence affects everyone regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, income, or age; occurs in all communities, and destroys relationships, families, lives, and business. Violence against women has been reported to be the leading cause of physical injury to women and has a devastating impact on women's physical and emotional health and financial security. Specifically, the workplace is one location where a batterer or a stalker can always find the victim. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, women are the victims in 80% of rapes and sexual assaults that take place in the workplace and, according to the U.S.

Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, approximately 18,700 incidents of workplace violence are committed by a current or former spouse, partner, or boyfriend/girlfriend.

As an employer of 26,000 people, the County has an obligation to ensure that when its employees are victimized by domestic or sexual violence, their jobs and the economic security that work affords, will not be jeopardized and that they are provided support, appropriate security assistance and information about resources.

Following the adoption of the revised policy, the Commission began working with the Bureau of Human Resources and the Employee Assistance Program to develop a new training curriculum and plan for educating County employees about the policy, as well as the County's new Workplace Violence Policy. The new training program will begin in early 2007. The Commission looks forward to supporting the County's commitment to helping women who are victims of violence remain economically empowered.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

An initiative of the Commission on Women's Issues, the County of Cook/City of Chicago Child Development Center has been offering high quality child care and development services to the employees of Cook County and the City of Chicago, as well as Head Start families for more than five years. Its program, providing age appropriate development and education services to 112 children from the ages of 6 months to five years old, expanded in 2005 to include a new Junior Kindergarten classroom.

Bright Horizons Family Solutions, leading experts in the arena of early childhood care and development services, operates the center. The Center serves as model for the integration of a Head Start program into an employer-sponsored center. The result is a rich learning environment and a community notable for the socioeconomic diversity of its families.

The Center also serves as a training facility for metropolitan area child care workers who are furthering their education. In 2006, partnering with Harold Washington College and Roosevelt University, the Center convened the first in a series of continuing education programs for Chicago area Head Start teachers and administrators regarding best practices. It also initiated a regular "lunch and learn" meeting for the directors of area centers. In addition, students of early childhood education at local colleges and

universities continue to have access to the Center for observation and field study in connection with their course work.

The Commission on Women's Issues serves as the delegate agency for administration of the Center's Head Start grants and chairs, through its executive director, the Center's Oversight Committee.

HEALTHY WOMAN SEMINARS

The Commission continued to sponsor its free luncheon seminar series "The Healthy Woman: A Monthly Educational Series for Chicago's Working Women." The series is a the result of a collaboration between the Commission on Women's Issues, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Office of Women's Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Healthy Woman Seminars were developed to provide working women in Chicago's central business district the opportunity to receive information relevant to their health at a time and location that is convenient for them. Topics have included: Women and Heart Disease, Growing Old Gracefully, Women's Sexual Health and Allergies and Asthma.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

What Will It Take? Building the Safest State for All Women and Girls

In 2006, the Commission joined a new statewide effort to address ending violence. **“What Will It Take? Building the Safest State for All Women and Girls”** is a yearlong initiative headed by Chicago Foundation for Women with the goals of convening representatives from community, academia and government groups working on issues of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault and the sex trade to promote positive working relationships and a shared advocacy agenda. In addition, the campaign will raise public awareness about the depth and breadth of violence in our state and how it can be ended.

Working Women for Change

The Commission is also represented on Women Employed’s new **“Working Women for Change”** initiative. Although everyone, at some point, needs time off from work because of illness or family emergency, millions of working women don’t get any sick leave and face the terrible choice of losing their jobs or taking care of their families. This initiative, led by women business and civic leaders, is building awareness about the problem of low-wage work and its impact on women and focused on winning support for paid sick leave for low-wage workers.

The PROMISE Initiative

An early result of the Commission’s 2006 public hearing and research on human trafficking is our new membership on the local task force of **The PROMISE Initiative**, a partnership to rescue minors from sexual exploitation led by the Salvation Army. The governmental and non-governmental organizations and survivors on this task force are developing a plan for prevention, intervention, rehabilitation and public awareness about the very real problem of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

UNsung HEROINE AWARDS

In observance of Women's History Month, the Commission presented the 10th and 11th Annual Unsung Heroines Awards at breakfast ceremonies in March 2005 and 2006. One woman from each of the County Board's 17 districts whose professional and volunteer achievements have made significant contributions to the quality of life in their communities was honored. According to President Stroger, the women were being saluted for their "long-standing, selfless commitment to improving conditions in their areas which will benefit current and future generations of County residents." The Unsung Heroine Award, now a County tradition, honors remarkable women as a way to bring their stories to light, to thank them, and to celebrate their achievements in Cook County.

2005 Unsung Heroines

Wyanetta Johnson - 1st District
Sharon D. Dixon - 2nd District
Constance Whitley - 3rd District
Annie B. Miller - 4th District
Doris J. Odem - 5th District
Ardelle H. O'Leary - 6th District
Sister Joellen Tumas PHJC - 7th District
America Sorrentini - 8th District
Kimberly Pinkard - 9th District
Charlotte Newfeld - 10th District
Connee Mazurkiewicz - 11th District
Laura Wiley - 12th District
Jean Cleland - 13th District
Patricia Glass - 14th District
Mary McCloskey - 15th District
Pat Steichmann - 16th District
Elizabeth Wurster - 17th District

2006 Unsung Heroines

Shirley Mae Fitzpatrick - 1st District
Debra G. Wesley-Freeman - 2nd District
Nancy Johnstone - 3rd District
Betty D. Porter - 4th District
Jennifer Artis - 5th District
Patricia Haseltine - 6th District
Petra Galvan Hacek - 7th District
Sister M. Rosaline Widak, CSFN - 8th District
Donna J. Kutrubis - 9th District
Maria Gebhard - 10th District
Sister Ann Vincent Terracina - 11th District
Anna Zolkowski Sobor - 12th District
Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team - 13th District
Gloria Lorenz - 14th District
Jean P. Murphy - 15th District
Catherine Bedard - 16th District
Minerva Santiago - 17th District

GIRL VIOLENCE AND AGRESSION: 2005 PUBLIC HEARING

On October 20, 2005, the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues, in partnership with GIRLS LINK, held its annual public hearing on the topic of "Girl Violence and Aggression: Problems and Solutions."

The Commission selected this topic because of the number of reports suggesting a dramatic rise in girls arrested for violence-related offenses, as well as sensationalized media accounts of groups of teen girls fighting. Interested in whether the statistics and the home videos told an accurate or complete story, the Commission decided to explore in more depth whether or why girl violence is on the rise, the causes of such real or perceived increase in violent behavior, and what needs to be done to address the problem.

The Commission heard testimony from a range of speakers including girls, academics, government officials and girl-serving organizations. Speakers presented information on the complex causes of girl-on-girl violence, prevention measures, and recommendations for change. Speakers included:

Earnest Jamison, GIRLS LINK

Jessica Palmert, Girl World

MayaYancey-Gilmore, Girl World

Mistura Salami, Girl World

Dr. Laurie Schaffner, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago

Kathleen Monahan, Clerk of the Circuit Court Domestic Violence Program

Wenona Thompson, GIRL TALK

Melissa Spooner, Project RENEW, Cook County Juvenile Probation

Leslie Kennedy, The Chicago Girls Coalition

After conducting follow up research and a review of current literature on the subject, the Commission issued in August 2006 its report "Girl Violence and Aggression: Problems and Solutions."

Key Findings of the Report

What Girls Say About Why They Fight. The report included findings drawn from the testimony of girls and research done with girls about why they fight and the role violence plays in their lives

The Impact of Media on Girl Violence. Speakers testified that contemporary media images and messages about aggressive girls, and violence in general, play a salient role in several dimensions related to the complex issue of girls' aggression towards other girls. First, the media in the United States portrays an increasingly violent society which, to a large extent, has normalized aggression. Second, media images of girls such as "bad girls gone wild" do not accurately reflect how most girls are behaving and instead lead to misperceptions and the myth of a so-called epidemic of girl-on-girl violence. Lastly, the media has sensationalized the increase of violence towards and by girls.

Girl Violence in Context of Social Factors. The report explores the range of social conditions, including poverty, homelessness, and adult violence, that contribute to aggression and violence on the part of girls. It also touched on the debate about whether girl-on-girl violence is in fact on the rise or merely perceived as such.

Empowering Girls Through Girl-Focused Programming. Speakers agreed that effective interventions should be gender-focused, and should include opportunities for girls to build healthy relationships, promote girl empowerment by teaching girls to make better choices, build the self-esteem of girls, and provide a physical space and program content which take into account the physical and emotional safety of girls.

Recommendations

While acknowledging that girls' violence requires a broad response from government, community based organizations, the private sector, funders, families and schools, the report's recommendations were limited to specific and achievable actions that can be taken by Cook County government. Those recommendations include:

- 1) The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center ("JTDC") should institutionalize gender-responsive programming and policies which take into account the distinct needs of girls, including their physical and emotional safety. In the short-term:

Recommendations continued

- (a) The JTDC should expand the very limited resources currently allocated to the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs. These resources should include trained and dedicated programming staff as well as funding to support the programs.
- (b) Support the formation of an advisory committee on the implementation of gender-responsive programs and policies at the JTDC. Working in partnership with the Commission on Women's Issues and the Sheriff's Department of Women's Justice Services, the JTDC has taken preliminary steps to organize such a committee of advisors from government agencies, community-based organizations and academia. These initial efforts should be continued and have the support of senior management at the JTDC.
- (c) Training on gender responsiveness in the criminal justice system, similar to training developed by the Sheriff's Department of Women's Services, should be mandatory and ongoing for all JTDC staff. Such training will prepare staff to understand and work more effectively with girls in detention.

2) The County should study long-term solutions for girls involved in the juvenile justice system including separate facilities and comprehensive services much like those which are offered to women through the Cook County Sheriff's Department of Women's Justice Services. The Sheriff's Department of Women's Justice Services uses a gender-responsive integrated model which can serve as an example for best practices for establishing a gender-responsive system for juvenile girls.

3) The County should expand Project RENEW to serve all girls on probation throughout all of the County's police districts. As of May 2006, 232 of the 728 girls on probation are in Project RENEW which prepares girls to return to their communities by helping them recognize the resources that are available to them and providing ties to their communities. Project RENEW is an excellent example of gender-responsive programming which should be expanded to serve all girls on probation.

4) The County should provide support for the development and maintenance of a GIRLS LINK website. This website would serve as a centralized source of links to many resources and tools geared towards serving girls involved in or at-risk for being involved in the juvenile justice system. Resources available include gender-responsive training material and program guidelines, a gender-responsive risk assessment instrument which helps

Recommendations continued

identify girls at risk for re-offending, and a program self-assessment tool for agencies to assess their ability to make a difference for girls.

5) The County should support programs that successfully connect girls in the juvenile justice system with community-based resources, including health and mental health services. A model gender-responsive, community-based case management program was developed by GIRLS LINK and piloted through the non-profit organization Metropolitan Family Services in 1998. The program has been funded by the Cook County Board of Commissioners since that time at a current annual budget of \$135,000. The case management program serves girls aged 10 to 16 who are petitioned through the court from two of Chicago's police districts, Districts 8 and 9, and who score high or moderate on a risk assessment for re-offending. Once referred into the program, girls are assigned a single case manager who provides brief supportive counseling, school advocacy, and linkages to critical resources in her community.

The case management program and model needs a comprehensive outcome evaluation to determine its efficacy, to assess its strengths and to identify areas that need improvement such as increasing its referral base. The outcome data should then inform a decision about whether the program needs modification, should be

replicated and/or whether alternative programs should be developed.

6) County departments and agencies, including the County's Bureau of Health Services, the Bureau of Public Safety and Judicial Coordination, the President's Office on Employment and Training, and the Office of the Chief Judge should seek funding opportunities, including grants, for programs that address the needs of girls at risk for violent behavior, provide alternatives to incarceration for girls and meet the unique needs of girls in the criminal justice system. These programs should include community based gender-responsive programs which give young women safe places to develop anti-violence strategies and conflict resolution skills, and which provide them with an array of social and educational services.

The entire text of the report is available on the Commission's webpage at www.cookcountygov.com (follow agency links to Women's Issues) or in hard copy by request at the Commission's office.

THE REALITIES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: 2006 PUBLIC HEARING

" When we talk about trafficking, we are not only talking about breaking the law, we are talking about modern-day slavery. We are talking about using people - and mostly women and children - as objects of barter... and it is not as though this happens on the other side of the world...it happens here."

Hannah Rosenthal, executive director, Chicago Foundation for Women

In what is believed to be the first governmental body on women's issues to convene such a hearing on this topic, the Commission on Women's 2006 public hearing addressed the subject of "The Realities of Human Trafficking in Cook County: Strategies for Ending the Exploitation of Women and Girls."

Human trafficking is defined by law as the recruitment, harboring, moving or obtaining a person by force, fraud or coercion for the purposes of involuntary servitude, debt bondage or sexual exploitation. In practice, human trafficking is modern day slavery which involves using people, most often women and children, as objects of barter.

On October 19, 2006, the Commission heard testimony from more than 14 experts, law enforcement officials, survivors and advocates about the nature of the sex trade and human trafficking industry, the impact it has on women and children in Cook County, and the need for resources to enforce anti-trafficking laws and to provide support to victims.

The Commission is finalizing its research, findings and recommendations. A report on the subject will be issued in February of 2007.

2005- 2006
Women's Commission Members

Peggy A. Montes, Chairperson

Alderman Carrie M. Austin

Laura Bartell

Dr. Beverly Jean Bennett

Dr. Frances G. Carroll

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