



2023 ANNUAL REPORT:  
*Listening to the Voices of  
Florida Women*



**FLORIDA COMMISSION**  
*on the STATUS of WOMEN*



# Message from our Chair



Dear Florida Citizens:

On behalf of the Florida Commission on the Status of Women, we are honored to present our *2023 Annual Report: Listening to the Voices of Florida Women*. This report was created to continue the conversations regarding the daily challenges facing Florida women, as identified through our statewide survey conducted in 2022.

The Florida Legislature, through Section 14.24, Florida Statutes, mandates the Commission to study the changing and developing roles of women in American society, including the socioeconomic factors that influence the status of women, the development of individual potential, and the encouragement of women to utilize their capabilities and assume leadership roles. The Commission's mission is to enrich the ability of Florida women and girls to achieve their fullest potential. It is in fulfilling our mandate and mission that the Commission has chosen to host roundtable discussions in cities throughout the state.

This report contains synopses of our first two roundtable discussions and invaluable information from our expert panelists. Although we will distribute the report to our statutorily-required top officials, our goal is for this report to reach numerous audiences, including government agencies and other state and local policymakers. Most importantly, we hope that our message ultimately helps improve the lives of all Florida women and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Sophia Eccleston". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Sophia Eccleston**  
Chair, Florida Commission on the Status of Women



# Table of Contents

2023: The Year in Review .....	4
Collaboration .....	4
Education .....	4
Celebration .....	5
Roundtable Discussions .....	6
Orlando Roundtable .....	6
Ocala Roundtable .....	10
Summary .....	13
About the Commission .....	14
Mission .....	14
Enabling Legislation .....	14
Acknowledgments .....	15
2023 Commissioners .....	16

# 2023: The Year in Review

## Collaboration

The 2022 Voices of Florida Women survey identified key issues and the critical needs women and families perceive as important in their communities, and highlighted the viewpoints of all segments of the population from across the state. The survey gathered responses from women of all ages in Florida and found many areas that Florida women believe are important. Results from the survey show the topics women consider critical such as healthcare, economic security, political and public policies affecting women, caregiving, and security and safety.

As a follow up to the survey, on March 23, 2023, the Florida Commission on the Status of Women announced its plan to host a series of roundtable discussions around the state. Healthcare (including mental health) and economic security were tied for first in the survey as a response to the biggest challenge facing Florida women. Therefore, these topics were the focus of the first two roundtable discussions held in Orlando and Ocala, respectively. The roundtable discussions are summarized in this report, and the events can be viewed in their entirety on the Commission's YouTube Channel.

The Commission will continue its roundtable discussions in 2024.

## Education

The Florida Women's History Art Contest, Essay Contest, and Video Contest present the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the many ways that women's history has become woven into the fabric of our state and national story. Sharing the narratives of women's lives encourages girls and women to think larger and bolder, and gives boys and men a fuller understanding of what women can accomplish. There is real power in hearing women's stories, as it inspires today's generations and opens the way to the future.

The Florida Commission on the Status of Women annually sponsors an art contest for K – 5 grades, an essay contest for grades 6-8, and a video contest for high school students related to women's history. The Florida Women's History contests are open to both boys and girls, and are designed to inspire the future leaders of our state and to help them learn about women's history. Winning students are awarded prizes and recognized by the Commission.

The 2023 theme of our history contests was Women in Sports. It was 50 years ago that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was passed into law. The law states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

These 37 words served as the groundwork to open the door of opportunity for girls, especially in sports. It took years after the passage of the law for it to begin to take hold, but it eventually led to the rise of collegiate women's athletic programs and professional leagues. Women are now making sports history, not just through their careers, but by being pioneers and breaking the glass ceiling, serving as an inspiration and paving the way for other women to follow in their footsteps.

Please visit our website at [fcsww.net](https://www.fcsww.com) to see our 2023 contest details and winners.

## Celebration

The Spirit of Community Awards recognizes meritorious women and men who have improved the lives of women in Florida and have served as positive role models for women and girls in their communities.

The award honors the hometown heroes who go above and beyond to serve their communities. Each year, the Commission seeks the nomination of these hard-working women and men. The recipients of the FCSW Spirit of Community Awards are the embodiment of dedicated community service. Each day these extraordinary Floridians mentor children, advocate for women and families in need, empower and inspire our youth, and serve to enrich the lives of their fellow Floridians. The honorees receive a commemorative plaque during a special ceremony hosted by the Commission.

This year we recognized our 2022 Spirit of Community Award Winners at a luncheon ceremony held in June in Orlando, Florida. Recipients of the award were Senator Lauren Book, Pam Brasch, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, Marie O. Etienne, PhD, Darnitha Johnson, Glenna Hayhoe, Jonnie Mae Perry, April Putzulu, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Meghan Shea, and Debbie Toler. The ceremony can be viewed on the Commission's YouTube Channel, and more details about the Spirit of Community Awards can be found on our website at [fcsw.net](https://www.fcsw.net).

On November 15, 2023, the Commission finished the year strong with our Florida Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. Governor DeSantis selected children's advocate Audrey Schiebler, fashion entrepreneur Lilly Pulitzer, and Senate President Kathleen Passidomo as the 2022 inductees. The ceremony was held in Tallahassee to a standing-room-only crowd that included many senators and other dignitaries. Presiding over the ceremony was Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody, with greetings offered from Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis and Speaker of the House Paul Renner, as well as a special videotaped message from Governor Ron DeSantis. Accepting on behalf of the late Audrey Schiebler was her husband, Dr. Gerald Schiebler, who called his wife's accomplishments a "manifestation of her magic". The late Lilly Pulitzer was then honored by her grandson, Jack McCluskey, who remarked that his grandmother was "the best role model" and "the light that has fueled my passion throughout my life". Senate President Kathleen Passidomo was accompanied by her husband, youngest daughter, and other family members. Senator Passidomo stated how honored she was to share the stage with "two very remarkable women, who did very different things yet made such a huge impact on our state". The ceremony was followed by a reception sponsored by the Senate President's office.



*"Each of the inductees we recognize today is part of this rich tapestry of women who have blazed trails, shattered glass ceilings, and paved the way for future generations."*

*- Lori Day, Chair, Florida Women's Hall of Fame Committee*

The entire 2022 Women's Hall of Fame event can be viewed on the Commission's YouTube Channel and more information about the Florida Women's Hall of Fame can be found on our website at [flwomenshalloffame.org](https://www.flwomenshalloffame.org).

The 2023 top ten finalists were chosen in August by the Commission's Hall of Fame Committee and have been sent to the Governor for his final selection. The finalists include Florence Alexander Ph.D., Judge Edith Atkinson, Dr. Judy Genshaft, Ellen Jacoby, Mona Jain M.D., Ph.D., May Mann Jennings, Graci McGillicuddy, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Penny Thompson, and Delores Barr Weaver. The ceremony for the 2023 inductees will be announced upon selection by the Governor, and more details can be found on our website in the near future.

# Roundtable Discussions

## ORLANDO ROUNDTABLE

Commissioner Belinda Keiser hosted the Voices of Florida Women Roundtable on Mental Health and Healthcare on June 28, 2023. The program was held at Keiser University's Orlando campus, who sponsored the program and reception immediately following. After opening remarks from State Senator Jason Brodeur and Mary Mayhew, president of the Florida Hospital Association, the group was split into two breakout rooms: a healthcare panel discussion and a mental health panel discussion.

***"The goal is for everyone to walk away with some information and resources that can help you. We want you to know the Commission is listening."***  
– Sophia Eccleston, Chair of the Florida Commission on the Status of Women



### Mental Health Panel

The mental health panel was moderated by Belinda Keiser. The panel was formulated to capture a broad range of perspectives on mental health from local and state officials, as well as from prominent Florida mental health experts. The panel included State Senator Jason Brodeur; Adianis Morales, Nacion de Fe Associate Pastor; Jan Edwards, President/CEO of Paving the Way; Marni Stahlman, CEO of Mental Health Association of Central Florida; Judge Alicia Latimore, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court; Mary Bridges, Orange County Public Schools; JoAnne Rice, Director of State Fire Marshal's Office; Major Carlos Torres, Orange County Sheriff's Office.

Major Torres began the discussion with some startling facts. Approximately 8,000-10,000 people per year experience some sort of mental health crisis in Orange County. Emergency calls from people in crisis are primarily made by young people aged 18-24, living near universities. Emergency Rooms have seen an alarming increase in the number of 17-24-year-olds coming in for care due to self-harm. COVID exacerbated an already growing mental health crisis.

Orange County is currently working to create models to help law enforcement better respond to people suffering from a mental health crisis. The primary challenge facing law enforcement is determining what resources they can provide, how they can best provide these resources, and at what service level. In 2020, the Orange County Sheriff's Office started a pilot program utilizing the co-responder model. The co-responder model pairs law enforcement with mental health providers to respond jointly to live calls for service from people in a mental health crisis. This model began with just two teams; today there are six teams. Orange County also implemented a youth mobile response program, aimed at children ages 0-18, in an attempt to establish trust and/or develop

relationships with children at a young age so they will seek out law enforcement for help with issues related to trauma or abuse. The legislature has also appropriated funds to the Mental Health Association of Central Florida, to expand care for children and adolescents.

As a part of a patient's overall physical health, the panel discussed the Collaborative Care Model, which focuses on bringing mental health services into the primary care setting. B4Stage4 is a philosophy that believes that mental health should be included when discussing one's overall health. As one panelist stated, it is a "checkup from the neck up". It is also recommended that primary care physicians include adverse childhood experiences as part of their medical history screening process. Telehealth has also helped bridge the health access divide. Telehealth medicine usage in Orange County has increased by 45% in the past 1½ years.



The panel discussion moved on to mental health in the minority communities. It was stated that many minorities only know about calling 9-1-1 in an emergency and are often not aware of other available resources. It was brought up that minorities may feel uncomfortable talking to a counselor. They may feel more comfortable speaking with a counselor who "looks like them", or who can relate to them. The panel also discussed how in some cultures it is taboo to receive care for mental health. It was noted that many minority boys and men – in fact, men in general – do not talk about their feelings and mental health because it is considered "weak". Boys dealing with bundled-up rage need to know it is OK to talk to someone who can help them with their feelings. Rage and mental health concerns are often the root cause of sexual assault or domestic violence. Many times, domestic violence victims cannot easily remove themselves from violent situations

and are victims of circumstance and financial concerns. Homeless women also continue to slip through the cracks of the system, as they typically have little to no access to resources.

Judge Latimore addressed the topic of mental health in the courts. Judge Latimore believes the worst outcome for someone dealing with mental health issues is going to jail. Putting offenders in jail to serve time without proper treatment does not address the underlying issue. The court system needs to develop more problem-solving programs to lower the level of recidivism and help reduce criminal behavior among misdemeanor and low-level offenders. There is a need to rectify the issue that brought them into the legal system to begin with and to recognize and treat mental health issues versus only addressing criminal behavior. Orange County has an early childhood court for children 0-5. Children and parents are required to participate in childcare and psychotherapy to address trauma the child may have experienced due to domestic violence or other mental health crises. This helps to reduce long-term effects of trauma on children and hopefully break the continuing cycle of trauma on top of trauma throughout the family structure.

When discussing mental health in schools with the panel, an example was given about what happened when a group of 5th graders were asked to raise their hands if they had ever received inappropriate pictures from someone they did not know; every hand in the room went up. Smartphones and the Internet may play a role in teaching children to be overly sexual and sometimes violent, as children can learn aggressive sexual behaviors through these websites. There are also websites to share or "brag" about a person's own criminal activities. The audience was also reminded that children tend to emulate their parents' and other adult behaviors.

More resources are being shared in the schools and other areas accessed by our children. Recent teen suicide rates in Orange County have decreased by 10% because they know who to call now. Some Orange County schools now allow the students to take life skill lessons instead of receiving a suspension. Educators are oftentimes the safest place for children to share their stories. Orange County Public Schools has a monitoring system in place for school computers that will search students' accounts for inappropriate pictures, suicidal ideations and domestic violence/abuse issues. Many times, students will reveal crisis situations with the intention of "being caught" so they can receive help without directly asking for it.

JoAnn Rice addressed the topic of mental health and first responders. The suicide rate for firefighters, EMS workers, and law enforcement is high. UCF Restores has Red Line Rescue and Blue Line Rescue, which are resources for first responders. Second Alarm Project at FAMU has developed a mental health toolkit for first responders. First Responder Project in Jacksonville is a resource for law enforcement, firefighters, veterans, and EMS personnel. The Orange County Sheriff's Office aims to have every sheriff's personnel in Orange County certified in crisis intervention for first responders.

9-8-8 is a suicide and crisis lifeline (previously known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.) As of July 2024 the 9-8-8 Program will no longer be federally funded; it will be state-controlled. Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition is the only consumer-based organization advocating for how to create funding mechanisms for 9-8-8 when funding reverts in 2024. This led to a discussion about how we, from a statewide standpoint, can create opportunities for behavioral healthcare funding on an annual basis. A funding mechanism is desperately needed to permanently fund mental health services. Senator Brodeur reported a record amount of mental health money awarded by the Legislature this year at \$458.4M.

The main barriers to mental health care are access and affordability. The panelists noted that there are great resources available – and many of these services are free of charge. A centralized repository is needed to find all the services people will need depending on their current issue(s): homelessness, mental health, domestic violence etc. Medical personnel need data-sharing capabilities, or interoperability. This can be achieved through online confidentiality using blockchain (most secure way to exchange information online), a system currently used for banking. Law enforcement needs to continue to enforce the law, provide services, and ensure people's safety and security, while partnering with other agencies and experts to create a recipe for success in the welfare of all Floridians.



## Healthcare Panel

This roundtable session was moderated by Commission Chair Sophia Eccleston, and included a panel of prominent Florida healthcare experts with a broad range of perspectives including Mary Mayhew, President of the Florida Hospital Association; Shannon Gravitte, Vice-President Government Advocacy Advent Health; Christine Muller, Chief Nurse Administrator, Keiser University; Jacob Horner, Nemours Children's Hospital; Jody Long, Collective Medical Director of Clinical Services; Jackson Cantfield, HCA Healthcare Associate Vice-President, Academic Strategy and Engagement; and Dominic Calabro, Florida TaxWatch.



***" We want to be able to bridge the social determinants that help to contribute to great health, great stability, family togetherness, and support that leads to thriving communities and a state that is incredibly successful because of the wellbeing of its population."***

***- Mary Mayhew, President of Florida Hospital Association***

Discussion began by addressing Florida's influx of new residents of the state, and our aging population. This moved into how to deliver quality healthcare to the women in our state in an already stressed industry. Medical costs continue to rise. The landscape of what drives the cost of healthcare includes the volume of high-cost utilization, lack of access to primary care, and the high cost of prescription drugs.

The panelists discussed that the majority of individuals in our state are covered for healthcare through Medicare (Federal coverage), Medicaid (partnership between Federal and State coverage), and private insurance. Oftentimes, individuals who do not have access to coverage must rely on the emergency department as a point of entry to the healthcare system, which is not in the best interest of individuals. An example was provided that described a patient who has longer-term respiratory issues and would benefit from having a primary care case management coordinator instead of having to rely on emergency room visits. Early intervention, financial literacy, and critical thinking skills were also identified as ways to address and neutralize the healthcare accessibility gap.

Panelists addressed how patients are gaining access to information including how to navigate the healthcare system and available financial resources. Charity care and sliding fee schedules were discussed as two potential resources to accessing healthcare. One discussion point was to expose and educate nurses on the various healthcare facilities and healthcare delivery systems such as grassroots care - meaning faith care, community care, and non-profit care. Follow-up, data gathering, and metric production are also essential to ensure patients are provided with adequate healthcare needs.

Many small businesses have been priced out of providing health insurance to their employees. The National Federation of Independent Business works with small businesses with less than 50 employees to provide help with federal, state, and commercial insurance offerings and wellness care.

The panel engaged in an informative and robust discussion regarding the Florida nurse shortage, expected to be 60,000 by the year 2035. 90% of the registered nurses in the state of Florida are women. Contributing factors to the attrition of nurses are workplace violence, poor working conditions, existing shortage of nurses putting a great demand on the workforce, and the change in the job requirements. Options such as easing Florida nursing school admission requirements, reducing the cost of attending nursing school, and modifying licensing protocol without compromising the caliber and quality of nurses entering the field were thoughtfully discussed.

These initiatives may lead to encouraging more Florida women to pursue careers in nursing and strengthen support for the nursing profession, exploring emerging nursing opportunities, and attracting the best candidates to Florida nursing schools. This inspiring discussion demonstrated the passion and dedication of Florida healthcare leaders who are actively working to resolve Florida's nursing shortage.

## **OCALA ROUNDTABLE**

On September 12, 2023, the FCSW hosted its second roundtable at The Webber Center of the College of Central Florida in Ocala, to discuss financial and health issues affecting Florida families. The program luncheon was sponsored by the Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership.



## **Financial Panel**

The panel on financial issues was moderated by Commissioner Maria Wells and included Yolanda East, executive director of Shepherd's Lighthouse, Karla Greenway, chief executive officer of Interfaith Emergency Services, Cheryl Martin, director of Marion County Community Services, Beth McCall, executive director of Marion County Children's Alliance, April McDonald, executive director of Project Hope and Carrie Theall, chief executive officer of the Early Learning Coalition of Marion County. The focus of the discussion was on financial health with an emphasis on the needs of the most vulnerable population -women and children struggling with homelessness, mental health, and domestic violence issues.

The panel discussed that Marion County is currently struggling with a homeless crisis. Although local agencies collaborate and work hard to provide shelter to those in need, the waiting lists for short-term crisis intervention and long-term transition spaces for homeless families are long. The closure of the County's domestic violence shelter this year has exacerbated the problem by

increasing the burden on the County's other providers. To effectively address the needs of women and their children who are victims of domestic violence and allow these families to recover, additional funding is needed to allow for more case managers to assist these families with mental health care and addiction services.

The panel discussed the need for high-quality childcare to prepare children for kindergarten with peer group interaction and pre-literacy skills. 76% of preschool children in Marion County are not in licensed childcare. Only 35% of the children entering kindergarten in Marion County are ready to begin school. This lack of preparedness means that these children will start school academically behind their peers and continue to lag in their learning throughout their educational journey. Currently, only 38% of Marion County third graders can read at grade level.

## Healthcare Panel



Commissioner Wells also moderated the panel discussion on healthcare availability for Marion County residents. The panel on healthcare was comprised of Dr. Don W. Bovell, MD, AdventHealth at Timberidge Ocala, Ann Burnett, chief executive officer of United Hands, Inc., and Debra Velez, chief operating officer, Marion County Hospital District.

Ms. Velez explained that Marion County has a legislatively created hospital district that was intended to assure that Marion County residents who could not afford healthcare could access the county hospital. Several years ago,

the County hospital closed, and the hospital district leased the hospital facilities to AdventHealth for a term of 40 years. Because AdventHealth prepaid the entire lease term, Ms. Velez believes healthcare in Marion County has changed for the better.

Due to the additional funds, the hospital district's Board of Trustees decided to focus on addressing health issues that are key concerns in Marion County, specifically, mental health, substance abuse, obesity and diabetes, tobacco use, and dental care. The hospital district began several programs to address these concerns including: 1. the Active Marion Project, a free community-wide health initiative to encourage workplace wellness and healthy lifestyles for Marion County residents; 2. programs in schools to encourage children to adopt healthy lifestyles through good nutrition and regular fitness; 3. adopting programs aimed at intervening in drug and vaping use; and 4. funding healthcare programs for the working poor.

As part of these initiatives, the hospital district established Beacon Point to address the enormous availability gap in healthcare services for the working poor. Beacon Point is an integrated healthcare system located on one campus that provides free services for outpatient care, including primary care, dental care, mental health care, medicine management, and substance abuse treatment (including a 17-bed unit for 28-day treatment with peer support from recovering addicts). In addition to providing free health care, the hospital district provides free rent and utilities to providers to assure that services remain free.

The hospital district also provides matching funds to organizations to help support increased mental health care and addiction services. Funding for these services has increased from \$9 million to \$17 million due to the hospital district's contributions of matching funds to various organizations.

Ms. Burnett discussed another project that is funded by the hospital district, United Hands. Inc.'s Freedom Clinic, which began more than 20 years ago to provide dental care for those who could not afford it. The impetus to provide dental care came from Dr. Bovell's emergency room experiences with those who were coming in with pain due to dental problems. The Freedom Clinic began as a once-a-year care event. Now, it holds three to four clinics each month with the goal of providing a safety net for the community and to transition people into regular dental care by providers. Using transportable equipment, this dental work is provided by volunteers, many from the University of Florida's dental school, at clinics being held throughout the county. The clinics primarily treat the working poor. The care statistics indicate that 60% of the clinic's clients are women, 50% are Caucasian, and 65% are aged 30-64 years old. Demand for services is high as they receive more than 5,000 inquiries for care each month.

Dr. Bovell provided key insights, using his experiences as an emergency room physician, on the importance of consuming whole foods, predominately plant-based, water, regular physical activity and community involvement as essential components of long-term health and wellness. He clarified clear that education on these components can help people effectively address reversible lifestyle diseases, including type II diabetes and heart disease. He also stated that research shows social isolation and loneliness are as bad for a person as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, he encouraged the consumption of more fresh fruits and vegetables, avoidance of processed foods and drinks, as well as avoiding tobacco and alcohol use.

The hospital district's investment of its resources to provide funds for essential basic primary, dental and optical care provides effective support to Marion County's residents' health and well-being.



# Summary

Many still believe that there is a stigma attached to receiving a mental health diagnosis. If someone is involuntarily hospitalized via the Baker Act, it tends to follow them throughout their medical history. The stigma associated with having a mental health issue needs to be removed from society. Our communities need to make mental health discussions “more normal”.

Children often don't know how to talk to parents about DM's (Direct Messages) they may receive from people. They need to know what action to take when they receive inappropriate material. The Protect our Children Project is working on legislation to have phone companies place a lock on phones sold to parents for use by their children. Adults will have to unblock their children's phones to allow them to have total access to the phone. It is believed that we need more conversations in school systems about what are appropriate materials to be sent and received, and what consent means during interactions with significant others.

Training is essential, and is the most important aspect of addressing mental health issues. We need to continue to share success stories and positive results of mental health treatments.

Floridians continue to struggle with the accessibility of healthcare due to the cost of quality healthcare, cost of prescription drugs, availability of affordable health insurance, and general health education. Many healthcare advocates are convinced that a shift towards prevention and wellness in the hopes of fostering a healthier community/patient will help drive down healthcare costs. There are also large-scale grants available to non-governmental organizations providing mental health and other healthcare services, including grants to ease barriers to care by paying patients' co-payments.

Key takeaways from the financial panel discussion included the primary causes of homelessness, which are unemployment, underemployment, and the lack of affordable housing. However, the underlying factors that pose the most difficult barriers to solving homelessness are domestic violence, mental illness, addiction, hunger, inadequate high-quality childcare, and the lack of reliable transportation. There is a need for expanded funding for services for the homeless, specifically the need for beds for both short-term intervention for families in crisis and the longer-term process of helping families successfully return to stable housing environments.

The Commission will continue its roundtable discussions in 2024 with events scheduled in Jacksonville (March), Sanford (May), Miami (July), Ft. Myers (August), and Destin (September). Please visit our website at [fcsww.net](https://www.fcsww.net) for more information.



# About the Commission

For more than 30 years, the Florida Commission on the Status of Women has served as a resource and champion for women throughout Florida. Established in 1991 by the Florida Legislature, the Commission is a non-partisan board of 22 appointed members. The Commission serves as an important resource for state and local leaders, so they have a better understanding of the needs, concerns, and challenges facing women in Florida. The Commission also serves as a resource for connecting women to the tools and resources necessary to live healthier, more prosperous lives.

## Mission

The Florida Commission on the Status of Women's mission is to enrich the ability of Florida women and girls to achieve their fullest potential.

## Enabling Legislation

FL Stat § 14.24 Florida Commission on the Status of Women. —

(1) There is established in the Office of the Attorney General the Florida Commission on the Status of Women, consisting of 22 members. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, the Attorney General, and the Governor shall each appoint four members, and the Chief Financial Officer and the Commissioner of Agriculture shall each appoint three members, for a term of 4 years. The members appointed shall include persons who represent rural and urban interests and the ethnic and cultural diversity of the state's population. No member shall serve more than 8 consecutive years on the commission. A vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointment.

(2) The commission shall meet once in the first, second, and fourth quarters of each year and upon the call of the chairperson or two other officers. Annually, at the meeting in the first quarter, officers consisting of a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, and treasurer shall be elected. Each officer shall serve until a successor is elected and qualified. No officer shall serve more than two consecutive terms in the same office.

(3) Members of the commission shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for per diem and travel expenses in accordance with s. 112.061.

(4) It shall be the duty of the commission to study the changing and developing roles of women in American society. The study shall include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- (a) The socioeconomic factors that influence the status of women.
- (b) The development of individual potential.
- (c) The encouragement of women to utilize their capabilities and assume leadership roles.
- (d) The coordination of efforts of numerous women's organizations interested in the welfare of women.
- (e) The identification and recognition of contributions made by women to the community, state, and nation.
- (f) The implementation of paragraphs (a)-(e) where working conditions, financial security, and legal status of both sexes are improved.

(5) The commission may apply for and accept funds, grants, gifts, and services from the state, the government of the United States or any of its agencies, or any other public or private source for the purpose of defraying clerical and administrative costs as may be necessary in carrying out its duties under this section.

(6) Beginning January 1, 1993, the commission shall report annually on January 1 to the Governor, the Attorney General, the Cabinet, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the minority leaders of the House and Senate on the study carried out under the provisions of this section.

## Acknowledgments

The Florida Commission on the Status of Women extends its gratitude to each person and organization who provided information and data included in this report. A special note of appreciation goes to Commissioner Belinda Keiser and her staff at Keiser University for their work on the Orlando Roundtable. We also want to thank Commissioner Maria Wells, the staff at The Webber Center of the College of Central Florida and Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership for their work on the Ocala Roundtable.

The FCSW Public Policy Committee was responsible for the creation, organization, and hosting of the first two roundtable events and will continue their great work in 2024. The committee members include Belinda Keiser, committee chair, Lori Day, Katherine English, Jennifer Guy-Hudson, Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka, Rep. Rachel Saunders Plakon, Melissa Stone, and Maria Wells. FCSW appreciates the committee's dedication to the continued success of our roundtable discussions throughout the state.

Members of the Annual Report Committee who were instrumental in overseeing the report through to its completion include Candace Falsetto, Chair, Melanie Bonanno, Katherine English, Maria Garcia, Stephanie Goforth, Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka, Claudia Medina Thomas, and Sophia Eccleston, Commission Chair.

FCSW would also like to extend our gratitude to Governor Ron DeSantis, Lt. Governor Jeanette Nuñez, Attorney General Ashley Moody, CFO Jimmy Patronis, Agricultural Commissioner Wilton Simpson, Florida Speaker of the House Paul Renner, Florida Senate President Kathleen Passidomo and the staff of the Office of the Attorney General for their continued support of the Commission and for making this publication possible.



# 2023 Commissioners

Sophia Eccleston, Chair (Wellington)

Lori Day, Vice Chair (St. Johns)

Claudia Medina Thomas, Secretary (Ponte Vedra Beach)

Rosie Paulsen, Secretary (Zephyrhills)

Maruchi Azorin, Member at Large (Tampa)

Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka, Member at Large (Ft. Myers)

Belinda Keiser, Parliamentarian (Ft. Lauderdale)

Abby Bean (Fernandina Beach)

---

Melanie Bonanno (Dover)

Jennifer Collins (Tampa)

Sierra Dean (Lakeland)

Katherine English (Ft. Myers)

Candace Falsetto (Coral Gables)

Maria Garcia (Miami)

Stephanie Goforth (St. Petersburg)

Jennifer Guy-Hudson (Tallahassee)

Sharon Hanlon (Naples)

Representative Rachel Plakon (Lake Mary)

Staci Sims (Gainesville)

Melissa Stone (Tallahassee)

Tina Vidal-Duart (Miami)

Maria Wells (Jensen Beach)

## STAFF

Danille R. Carroll, Interim Executive Director

Kimberly Mehr, Operations Coordinator





# FLORIDA COMMISSION *on the STATUS of WOMEN*

@flacsw   

  Florida Commission on the Status of Women



[fcsw.net](http://fcsw.net)



[flwomenshalloffame.org](http://flwomenshalloffame.org)