ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

To John C. Carney, Governor, State of Delaware, The Delaware General Assembly

&

Amy Bonner, Secretary, Delaware Department of Human Resources
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background & Mission
OWAA’S MISSION
POLICY
EVENTS
RESEARCH AND REPORTS
PUBLIC OUTREACH

Delaware Commission for Women
DELAWARE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN MEMBERS

Delaware Women's Workforce Council
DELAWARE WOMENS WORKFORCE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Delaware Women's Hall Of Fame
DELAWARE WOMEN’S HALL OF FAME COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DELAWARE WOMEN’S HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Recommendations For The 151st General Assembly
BACKGROUND & MISSION

2020

Activities & Recommendations Report
The Office of Women’s Advancement & Advocacy (OWAA) was launched in fall of 2017 as the result of House Bill (HB) 4 of the 149th General Assembly. The bill gave OWAA the express purpose of promoting the equality and equity of women in all areas of society across the state of Delaware. In order to accomplish this goal, OWAA was charged with the following responsibilities:

- Fostering collaborations among governmental entities, individuals, organizations, businesses and institutions toward the elimination of gender-based bias and discrimination.
- Referring complaints and inquiries to the appropriate state departments, agencies or community organizations.
- Gathering and sharing information on the status of women, including conducting research projects to report on the status of women in Delaware.
- Advising executive and legislative bodies on the effect of proposed legislation on women through reports, statistics and testimony.
- Providing recommendations regarding the implementation of any gender-based legislation or policy.
- Making specific legislative proposals relating to the removal of discriminatory laws and practices.
- Producing and distributing educational and informative media materials.
- Performing other functions and duties as imposed by law or as assigned to it by the Governor, the Secretary of the DHR or the General Assembly.

OWAA was instructed to report its activities and recommendations, including the activities of the Delaware Commission for Women, the Delaware Women’s Workforce Council, and the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee, to the Governor, Secretary of the DHR, and the General Assembly.
The following report highlights how OWAA, along with the Delaware Commission for Women, the Delaware Women’s Workforce Council, and the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee, is fulfilling the tasks and duties set forth by House Bill 4.

OWAA was established as a unit of the DHR with the purpose of promoting the equality and equity of Delaware women in all areas of society. OWAA is responsible for overseeing the state’s women’s rights work, including leading the ongoing implementation of women’s rights legislation, evaluating current women’s rights legislation, building support for new legislation, and advising the Governor’s Office, the Legislature and the Secretary of the DHR. OWAA relies on, and utilizes, the most up-to-date data, trends and statistics in order to stay informed about the issues affecting women and girls across Delaware. Through such work, OWAA can accurately report on the status of women and girls; advocate for women’s rights policies; serve as a clearinghouse, providing information on the status of women to the public, state agencies, the General Assembly, the Judiciary, organizations, businesses, and institutions; and, when necessary, refer complaints and inquiries to the appropriate state departments or agencies as well as community organizations.
OWAA also provides staff support to the Delaware Commission for Women, the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame Committee, and the Delaware Women's Workforce Council. The Delaware Commission for Women is responsible for advising the Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy on strategic planning, project development and programming.

The Delaware Women's Workforce Council seeks to achieve gender equality in every workplace in the state by eliminating the gender-based wage gap; removing the visible and invisible barriers to women's advancement; and ensuring that every person, regardless of gender, has an equal opportunity for advancement in the workplace.

The Delaware Women's Hall of Fame Committee fosters an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the many contributions Delaware women have made to their homes, communities, the state and nation, and annually recognizes the achievements of remarkable Delaware women through the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame.

OWAA focuses its efforts into several activities including policy, events, research and reports, and public outreach.
During the 150th General Assembly, OWAA provided research assistance, testified at committee hearings, coordinated advocacy efforts, and met with legislators regarding the following legislative initiatives, all of which were adopted by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Carney:

- **HB 1** was the final leg of a constitutional amendment to ensure equal rights regardless of sex. (Longhurst)

- **HB 246** added the intentional touching of another person with semen to the definition of sexual contact. By doing so, the act of a person intentionally touching another person with semen without consent becomes the crime of unlawful sexual contact third degree. (Longhurst)

- **HB 239** prohibits a pelvic, rectal or prostate examination by a health care practitioner or professional on an individual who is anesthetized or unconscious unless the patient provides consent. (Griffith)

- **SB 78** requires that the health education programs presented by the Department of Education include instruction on what it means to "consent" in the context of a sexual encounter. (Poore)

- **SB 60** clarifies that, in order to be found guilty of prostitution, the person must be 18 years or older. (Poore)

- **HB 102** allows a person who is arrested for, or convicted of, any crime, except a violent felony, to file an application for a pardon or expungement or make a motion to vacate judgment if the crime was a direct result of being a victim of human trafficking. (K. Williams)

- **SB 169** provides a uniform, comprehensive, clear, fair and constitutionally sound definition of the disclosure of private, sexually explicit images without consent as well as remedies for the harm it causes. (Hansen)

**OWAA also provided technical assistance or committee testimony for several bills that were tabled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The office looks to offer support to those bills if they should be re-introduced in the next legislative session.**
The passage of HB 3 with the House Amendment 4 during the 149th General Assembly guarantees that all full-time state employees, including employees of school districts, who are continuously in the employment of the state for at least one year, are eligible for 12 weeks of paid leave upon the birth or adoption of a child six years of age or younger. From April 1, 2019 until June 30, 2020, 1,100 state employees, including those from the executive branch, non-executive branch, school districts and charter schools participated in the paid parental leave program.

Per HB 3, the DHR is required to submit a report to the Delaware General Assembly and the Governor on the parental leave program annually. OWAA was an integral part of the committee overseeing the development of the paid parental leave report. The report, written by OWAA and with data provided by DHR, tracks key elements of the paid parental leave program during its first year, including how the policy was developed and distributed to agencies, data on projected and actual participation, data on the duration of leave, how the policy was communicated both internally and externally, and how the policy was integrated into recruitment and retention efforts.

To promote the program to both internal and external audiences, OWAA worked with several divisions, on the following information and outreach activities:

- **Posters designed for external audiences that highlighted the program as one of many great benefits state employees enjoy.**

- **Posters designed for internal audiences to ensure employees understood and were aware of the benefit.**

- **Social media graphics on several channels and platforms.**

- **Development and dissemination of a Frequently Asked Questions document.**
Graphics on the TV screens in the Carvel building

A video series highlighting families that utilized the benefit.

Testimonials from employees about the benefit.

Updates to materials used for onboarding new state employees.

Results from the OWAA’s evaluation survey, which as of June 16, 2020, received responses from more than 300 state employees (30% response rate), demonstrated an overwhelmingly positive impression of the paid leave policy and its impact on employees and their families. Several ideas were shared for how the state could expand its support for state employees with young children as well as important feedback regarding both the implementation of the policy and the transition to and from parental leave. This feedback was codified in an evaluation report that was distributed to all HR leads and is being carefully considered by OWAA to inform future projects related to improving the experiences of state employees.

Family Friendly Workplace

During 2020, OWAA continued to work on creating family friendly workplace facilities and policies. Although this work takes many forms, OWAA focused its 2020 efforts on having space set aside for lactation/pumping and the installation of changing tables. OWAA also worked on the DHR policy around lactation/pumping. During this process, OWAA met with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) about lactation spaces in state buildings, conducted research and drafted a memo to OMB on lactation-space best practices, provided feedback to a checklist for lactation room evaluation, and met with the A Better Balance organization for guidance on different state lactation policies.

COVID-19 Committee

During 2020, OWAA’s Director served on DHR’s internal COVID-19 committee. The purpose of this committee was to develop health and safety recommendations for DHR and other executive agencies. Over the course of the committee meetings, OWAA regularly provided research on best practices from other states, ways to support working parents and presented workplace flexibility options for consideration.
Over the past two years, OWAA has led, and participated in, a variety of events in order to engage the public, share knowledge and resources, and celebrate the achievements of Delaware women. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, some previously planned in-person events for 2020 were canceled, but OWAA pivoted quickly to ensure many more were transformed into virtual events.

Celebrating the Equal Rights Amendment

In January 2019, OWAA co-sponsored an event celebrating the Equal Rights Amendment and recognizing the women of the 126th General Assembly. The event was hosted by House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst with special guests Governor John Carney, women’s historian Dr. Marie Laberge, Senator Stephanie Hansen and Senator Karen Peterson. During the event, Dr. Marie Laberge spoke about the historical importance of the Equal Rights Amendment.

National Girls and Women in Sports Day

A highlight of the 2019 and 2020 calendar of events, was an OWAA co-hosted event in honor of National Girls and Women in Sports Day. The day was devoted to recognizing the progress of girls and women in sports, and the benefits that sports and fitness activities can bring to the lives of girls and women. OWAA brought together female athletes from all over the state (representing each school district) for a proclamation event with the Governor’s office.

Equal Pay Day

In March 2019, OWAA participated in a press conference for Equal Pay Day held in Legislative Hall to highlight the wage gap in Delaware. OWAA’s director spoke about the latest state-level data and promoted the upcoming salary negotiation workshops being hosted by the office. Unfortunately, the press conference for Equal Pay Day 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a substitute, OWAA utilized social media to raise awareness of the wage gap.
Legislator Speed Meeting

In March 2019, the office hosted a “Legislator Speed Meeting” and invited all Delaware legislators to meet with a variety of Delaware women’s organizations. Each organization had a few minutes with each legislator, providing an opportunity to share their mission and introduce themselves. In September 2019, OWAA hosted a non-partisan training titled, Nonprofit Advocacy, Lobbying, and Election Year Activities: Federal and State Laws. The purpose of the training was to educate women’s groups about what they can and cannot do in terms of advocacy if they are operating as a 501(c)(3) organization.

Salary Negotiation Workshops

The Salary Negotiation Workshops, conducted in 2019 and 2020, helped participants gain the skills and confidence to successfully negotiate salary and benefits packages. The 2019 workshops included four in-person sessions that took place statewide and had 150 total participants. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the in-person workshops scheduled for April were delayed and then turned into virtual events hosted in October. The new virtual format allowed OWAA to expand the number of workshop participants, resulting in 300 attendees. As a result of the program’s success, OWAA is planning to offer additional virtual workshops in the future.

Finally, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, OWAA held a Delaware Women & COVID-19 Town Hall, a virtual event that included Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester, Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long, Secretary of Labor Cerron Cade and OWAA Director Melanie Ross Levin. At the event, which has been viewed over 4,000 times to date, panelists discussed how the pandemic was affecting Delaware women and shared what services were available for assistance.
In addition to hosting public events and other speaking engagements, OWAA participated in several networking events to build relationships with community partners and increase public awareness of the office. Examples of networking events include the following:

- Delaware Hispanic Commission Conference (2019)
- Forum of Executive Women (2020)
- Historical Marker Suffrage Celebration (2020)
- Millennial Summit Conference (2019, 2020)
- National Association of Women’s Commissions Annual Conference (2019, 2020 canceled due to COVID-19)
- The New Castle County Chamber of Commerce Women’s Leadership Conference (2019)
- Pride Festival (2019, 2020-canceled due to COVID-19)
- Rotary Club of Wilmington Networking Luncheon (2020)
- Social Media Conference (2019, 2020)
Over the past two years, OWAA has conducted extensive research and created numerous fact sheets, memos and reports on the status of women in Delaware including a memo for the Governor’s office on state responses to COVID-19 and the impact on low income populations and the Delaware Equal Pay Fact Sheet (2019, 2020).

One of OWAA’s largest research undertakings was the Delaware Women’s Voices Survey, which was conducted from October 31, 2019 through January 31, 2020 with support from the Delaware Commission for Women, Delaware Women’s Workforce Council and several community partner organizations. The survey was designed to learn more about the concerns of Delaware women and provide the women of the First State with a mechanism for sharing their perspectives on the most pressing issues affecting their communities and their own well-being. Responses from the 801 Delaware women who participated in the survey are helping to guide OWAA perspectives and programs moving forward and also serve as a resource to help nonprofit, community, philanthropic and government entities develop and strengthen supports that can help women and girls in Delaware. The survey was conducted in partnership with the National Association of Commissions for Women as part of the Voices of Women in America (VoWA) Initiative. To summarize the findings, OWAA produced the Delaware Women’s Voices Report.

Amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, OWAA became aware of several national reports on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women; however, there was little information about Delaware women specifically. To fill the gap, OWAA published the “Delaware Women and the Impacts of COVID-19” report which outlined the disparities experienced by Delaware women including the overrepresentation of women among essential workers and those experiencing:

- **Unemployment due to temporary closures of businesses**
- **Health and economic disparities**
- **Increases in domestic violence**
- **An imbalance of caregiving responsibilities which created difficulties for women to remain in the labor force**

OWAA published the report in July 2020 with plans to complete a follow-up report in March 2021. The report continues to be widely shared and has been featured in an article and video on WBOC-TV 16.
Other research topics, reports and fact sheets included the following:

- Other states’ HR responses during the COVID-19 crisis
- Adolescents and supervision related to school closings
- Responses by other women’s organizations to COVID-19
- The Federal CARES Act and its impact on DHR and low-income populations
- Policies for returning to work
- Creating a Talent Compact in Delaware
- Hair discrimination
- Retirement savings gap for women
- The impact of frequent moves on military spouses, particularly those with non-transferable state licenses related to work
- Inclusive LGBTQ state policies
- Minimum wage
- Paid family and medical leave

DELAWARE PAY EQUITY

Nationally, women earn 81% of all men’s median earnings. The wage gap for all industries is approximately 21%. This gap is influenced by a variety of factors, including the type of industry, occupation, and other characteristics that may impact earnings. Women and girls are often more likely to be in lower-paying jobs, which contributes to the overall wage gap. The National Association of Women in Management (NAWM) and the Delaware Women’s Advocacy Network (Dwan) have collaborated to address the gender wage gap in Delaware. By decriminalizing and directing the state’s wage gap and promoting policies that support women’s financial stability, Delaware can make significant progress in reducing the gender wage gap.

DELAWARE WOMEN’S VOICES SURVEY REPORT

Between October 31, 2019 and January 31, 2020, the Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy (OWAA) worked with the Delaware Women’s Advocacy Network (Dwan) to conduct a survey of women in Delaware. The survey aimed to gather insights into the experiences and challenges faced by women in the state, as well as their perspectives on issues related to gender equality and women’s rights. The survey included questions on employment, pay equity, health disparities, social inequities, and economic security. The results of the survey will be used to inform policy decisions and support initiatives aimed at advancing women’s rights and promoting gender equality in Delaware.
Public Outreach

Social media increases public awareness of OWAA and allows the office to quickly and meaningfully engage Delawareans on the issues that are most pressing for women in the First State. Therefore, over the past two years, OWAA has concentrated on growing its social media presence across several channels including email (over 1,600 contacts through Constant Contact), Facebook (more than 1,800 followers), Twitter (476 followers), Instagram (more than 2,000 followers), YouTube, and TikTok.

Social content included hundreds of graphics, important announcements, legislative updates and uplifting stories about Delaware. Through email, the office sent 37 newsletters, announcements and updates to subscribers. OWAA also created several specific social media campaigns in order to build awareness around particular issues and events.

The Facebook Live Town Hall on DE Women & COVID was OWAA’s most successful social media post to date; the post reached 11,627 people.

delawarewomen@delaware.gov

Submit any questions to delawarewomen@delaware.gov
EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS:

Delaware Women and COVID-19

The 2020 Census

21 Day Racial Equity Challenge

Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame

Delaware Women's Voices Project

Salary Negotiation Workshops

Women's Equality Day

Women's Suffrage Anniversary

She's On Her Way Event
Social media continues to be particularly critical during the pandemic. In addition to shifting many in-person events to virtual formats, OWAA utilizes social platforms to connect with the public and partners by providing rich, engaging and supportive content. Two specific programs that emerged were “Girls Rock Story Time” and the “Member Spotlight” series.

“Girls Rock Story Time” was a video series featuring Delaware women reading their favorite empowering books to provide enriching activities for students and parents when schools were closed. Featured readers included Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long; former Miss Delaware’s Outstanding Teen Jacqueline “The STEM Queen” Means; OWAA staff; and members of the Delaware Commission for Women, the Delaware Women’s Workforce Council and the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee. Collectively, the video series reached more than 6,400 views.

The “Member Spotlight” series educated Delawareans about the work of the various volunteer groups staffed by OWAA, including the Delaware Commission for Women, the Delaware Women’s Workforce Council, and the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee. OWAA asked members of these groups about their backgrounds. The answers were transformed into 30-second videos which were viewed more than 600 times.
DELAWARE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

2020

ACTIVITIES DURING THE 150TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Delaware Commission for Women

The Delaware Commission for Women is responsible for advising OWAA on strategic planning, project development and programming. Upon its reorganization in 2017, the Commission adopted by-laws and has met quarterly over the past two years. The Commission can have up to nine members, representing all three counties and the City of Wilmington. Members serve for various term lengths and are appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

Members:

**DR. MARIAN PALLEY**  
Commission Chair  
Professor Emerita, University of Delaware

**SHERESE BREWINSON-CARR**  
Commission Vice Chair  
Senior Administrator, DE Department of Labor

**ALISHA WAYMAN BRYSON**  
Vice President  
Wayman Fire Protection

**KATHERINE CAUDLE**  
Staff Representative  
AFSCME Council 81

**SOBIA CHOUDHRI, DDS**  
American Dental Care

**MICHELLE TAYLOR**  
President & CEO  
United Way of Delaware

**LAURA BURNETT**  
Retired Teacher

**TWO VACANCIES**
She's On Her Way Event

While the responsibility for planning and hosting the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame was reassigned to the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee, the Commission for Women continued its recognition of Delaware women by planning and hosting a biennial “She’s On Her Way” Award, which recognizes the achievements and community contributions of remarkable young women ages 18-30. A subcommittee was created to oversee the award process, and on March 1, 2019, in partnership with First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, the Commission publicly presented the award to four women at a high tea ceremony at Buena Vista.
The Delaware Women's Coalition

The Delaware Commission for Women created a statewide Women's Coalition to provide nonprofits that serve Delaware women the opportunity to coalesce around mutually supported initiatives. The Women's Coalition currently has 57 members representing organizations such as the Junior League of Wilmington, National Coalition of 100 Black Women-Delaware Chapter; YWCA of Delaware, Fund for Women, United Way of Delaware, DE Coalition Against Domestic Violence, AAUW of Delaware and the Rodel Foundation. Since its inception, the Women’s Coalition has met quarterly and discussed various initiatives that the committee could work on collectively. For example, the “speed meeting” event hosted by OWAA was an initiative of the Women’s Coalition. Nine Delaware women’s organizations and three legislators attended the “speed meeting” event. The coalition also hosted a nonprofit advocacy training on September 9, 2019 with eighteen organizations in attendance. Invited guests from the Morris James law firm and the Alliance for Justice in Washington, DC spoke on effectively advocating and lobbying as a 501 (c)(3).

The Commission participated in the Delaware Women’s Voices project by sharing the survey and participating in a training related to the project. Commission members also wrote letters of support to legislators to highlight key bills, including Senate Bill 60 which clarified that in order for a person to be found guilty of prostitution the person must be 18 years or older; Senate Bill 78 which required health education programs in Delaware schools to teach about consent, and House Bill 102 which allows for victims of human trafficking to have their record expunged.
DELAWARE WOMEN'S WORKFORCE COUNCIL

2020

ACTIVITIES DURING THE 150TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Delaware Women's Workforce Council

Advocating for Delaware women.

The Delaware Women’s Workforce Council is charged with eliminating the gender-based wage gap, removing the visible and invisible barriers to women’s advancement, and ensuring that every person regardless of gender has an opportunity for advancement in the workplace. The Council was formally established in December 2017, and has since created by-laws, undergone a strategic planning process, and met quarterly to discuss workforce issues and actions the Council could take. The council can have up to 11 members, representing all three counties and the city of Wilmington, who serve for various term lengths, and are appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

Council Members

LOUISE CUMMINGS-LEWIS, ESQ.*
Council Chair
Founder of Ballard’s Reading Buddies

ROXANNE FERGUSON
Executive Director
Middletown Area Chamber of Commerce

DR. MARIE LABERGE
Assistance Professor
University of Delaware

LINDA BARNETT
President (Wilmington Chapter)
AAUW Delaware

YVONNE GORDON, MBA, EdD.,*
Owner/Operator
Orangetheory Fitness Pike Creek

CHRISTOPHER WATERS
Consultant, Impact Strategies

KIMBERLY REINAGEL-NIETUBCZ
Council Vice Chair
Strategic Policy Analytic, University of Delaware

KATEY EVANS
President of Sales & Marketing
Evans Farms

PASTOR RITA PAIGE
Star Hill AME Church

FOUR VACANCIES

* = term ended in October 2020
With support from the Delaware Women’s Workforce Council, OWAA hosted “Work Smart” sessions in 2019 and 2020 to educate women entering, or already in, the workforce on salary negotiation strategies, including how to articulate personal value and benchmarking a target salary and benefits. The workshops also informed attendees about the wage gap and how it impacts women’s careers. To conduct the workshops, OWAA contracted with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and partnered with several organizations including AAUW of Delaware, National Coalition of 100 Black Women Delaware Chapter, The Biden Institute and YWCA Delaware.

The Delaware Women’s Workforce Council also supported the Delaware Women’s Voices project and assisted with a job search tips video series whereby a member of the Council interviewed a job search expert.
DELAWARE WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

2020

ACTIVITIES DURING THE 150TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Established in 1981, the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee recognizes and acknowledges the achievements of remarkable Delaware women and fosters an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the many contributions all women across the First State make in their homes, communities and across the state and nation. The committee reviews applications and inducts new members into the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame annually. The Committee comprises seven members, representing all three counties and the city of Wilmington. Committee members serve for various term lengths, and are appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

Council Members

KAY KEENAN
Hall of Fame Chair
President
Growth Consulting Inc.

DONNA MASLEY
Owner
Masley Enterprises, Inc.

JACKIE GRIFFITH
Hall of Fame Vice Chair
Special Assistant to the President
Director of Government and Community Relations
Delaware State University

DR. THERESA DEL TUFO
CEO
Del Tufo Consulting

THE HON. NANCY COOK
Former State Senator

TARA L. SMITH
Director, M.A. in Strategic Communication
Program Instructor Department of Communications
University of Delaware

TWO VACANCIES
On October 17, 2019, the Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy and the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee, hosted the 28th annual Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony to celebrate six phenomenal inductees: Blanche Williams Stubbs, Marie Swajeski, Judge Jan Jurden, Maria Matos, Tania Vincusky Culley, and Drew Fennell. The event was held at Dover Downs with more than 300 guests who enjoyed a night of music, dinner, celebratory speeches, and the presentation of this prestigious award.

The committee typically begins the nomination and selection process in the months immediately following the event. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty it brought, the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame Committee decided to select eight individuals to be inducted into the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame over the course of the next two years (2020 and 2021). For the 2020 cycle, the Committee selected two Delaware suffragists, the late Margaret Burton White Houston and the late Mary Seward Phillips Eskridge, and partnered with the Delaware Women’s Suffrage Centennial Committee to induct these nominees at a suffrage celebration event that was postponed until 2021. For the 2021 cycle, the Committee chose six exceptional women to be inducted into the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame in the fall of 2021. The 2021 inductees include Fayetta M. Blake, Marianne Blackburn "Mimi" Drew, Ann Jaffe, The Honorable Valerie Longhurst, The Honorable Jennifer Cohan, and The Honorable Stephanie T. Bolden.

The committee has also been working on creating opportunities beyond the annual event to honor the Hall of Fame inductees. Some of these activities include improving the physical displays in the state office buildings, updating the information about all inductees and making it more publicly available, and exploring other avenues to inform the public about these incredible women.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 151ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2020

Activities & Recommendations Report
RECOMMENDATIONS:

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS encompass a wide range of issues that impact women. These initiatives are intentionally broad, as OWAA seeks to help all Delaware women and girls achieve their potential at every stage of life. Developing recommendations, both legislative and regulatory, is an ongoing process. These recommendations are not meant to be an exhaustive list of every policy that might help women in the First State, nor are they meant to be a detailed blueprint for execution. In addition, they do not consider budget and resource requirements.

These recommendations do build on steps Delaware has already taken, and OWAA looks forward to working with the Administration and the General Assembly to further develop policies that improve equity and equality for women in the coming legislative session.

If you have suggestions, please contact OWAA Director, Melanie Ross Levin, at melanie.rosslevin@delaware.gov or at 302-577-8790.

Recommendation: Prioritize Supports for Women During Covid-19 Recovery Efforts

According to OWAA’s report on Delaware women and COVID-19, Delaware women have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are over-represented in front-line occupations and among those affected by temporary business closures. The analysis also shows that Delaware women, especially Black and Hispanic women, are more likely to be in poverty while at the same time being key family breadwinners. Add in increased caregiving needs due to child care and school closings, and Delaware women are being hit especially hard. These unfortunate circumstances necessitate that the needs of Delaware women be thoroughly addressed in the continued COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts. A first step would be to include gender data in any ongoing data dashboards, and, given the impact on women of color, that data should be cross tabulated with race. Furthermore, any stimulus and recovery packages should have an eye on how they are impacting the most vulnerable — including Delaware women and especially Black and Hispanic women. The good news is that the State has created innovative programs such as the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Training Initiative to assist Delaware workers and their families who have lost jobs and income due to the COVID-19 crisis. Given that women have been disproportionately impacted by job loss over the course of the pandemic, it is essential that such programs are accessible to Delaware women.
Recommendation: Provide Paid Family and Medical Leave Program and Guarantee Paid Sick Days to all Delaware Workers

Without more permanent access to 1) paid family and medical leave and 2) paid sick days that cover all working people – across the government, nonprofit and private sectors – Delawareans face greater financial instability; pose an increased health risk to themselves, their families and others; and put additional strain on the public health and safety infrastructure’s ability to contain COVID-19 and future public health crises.

Individuals need to stay home when they are sick or when they have no other way to care for children. However, they often go to work anyway because they cannot risk the loss of income. Although the State of Delaware took a huge step in providing paid parental leave to state workers and many state employees have access to paid sick time, there are still thousands of Delaware workers that do not have access to any paid family and medical leave or paid sick days. Emergency federal measures helped provide a temporary fix, but those provisions are scheduled to sunset on Dec. 31, 2020. Plus, exemptions excluded as many as 334,551 workers in Delaware. Furthermore, 40 percent of Delaware’s private sector workforce, or 131,128 Delaware workers cannot earn a single paid sick day for reasons unrelated to COVID-19. 1 The State, in response to the COVID-19 emergency, exercised its discretion starting on March 12, 2020 to provide that State employees may be paid State Paid Emergency Leave at 100% of the employee’s regular earnings under specific circumstances related to COVID-19 for up to two weeks.

Recommendation: Increase Investments in Child Care

Child care is critical to Delaware’s economy and the well-being of its citizens because it helps parents go to work and supports children’s healthy development. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has further strained an already overburdened child care system in Delaware, leaving many parents without enough options for care. During the pandemic, child care providers’ expenses have gone up 40%, while enrollment has gone down 50%. Providers are also facing staffing shortages due to low pay and no benefits in most cases. National predictions indicate that Delaware could permanently lose one-third of its providers due to COVID-19. 2 With fewer child care choices more women, who are the more often the primary child care provider in the home, will be forced out of the workforce in order to care for their children.

State funding not only helps providers keep their doors open, but it keeps costs down for families and supports providers across all settings including public schools, family child care, as well as community and center-based providers. Fortunately, Governor Carney has invested $135 million in enhanced reimbursement for child care during the COVID-19 pandemic, a vital step in preserving the child care industry. However, further investment in child care is required to ensure that Delaware’s workforce, especially women, remains strong.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation: Strengthening Workplace Harassment Protections

COVID-19 has left many workers more vulnerable to workplace harassment. This increased vulnerability is especially true for workers in low-wage jobs, many of whom are on the frontlines of the crisis. Delaware’s law could be further strengthened in the following ways to help protect all workers, but especially those in low wage jobs, from workplace harassment:

1.) Extend the statute of limitations for filing workplace discrimination claims. Providing for a three-year statute of limitations (SOL) for filing a claim is vital to ensuring that workers can access justice and hold their employers accountable. Under Delaware law, employees only have 300 days to bring a claim which is inadequate for those processing the trauma of harassment and/or discrimination. In addition, low-wage workers often need the time to find a new job to put food on the table before being able to consider bringing a claim. Several states provide a longer SOL under state law: three years in New York and California, years in Oregon and Kentucky, and six years in Ohio.

2.) Extend workplace discrimination protections to Independent Contractors and employers with fewer than four employees. Some workers most vulnerable to workplace harassment fall within these categories—like domestic workers and gig workers. Workers should be protected from discrimination and harassment no matter the size of their employer or how they are classified.

Recommendation: Create a Comprehensive Plan to Increase Wages

In Delaware, the current minimum wage is $9.25 per hour; equating to just $19,240 per year for someone working 40 hours per week for the full year. Yet, for a family of three, perhaps a mother with two children, the federal poverty level stands at $21,720. While Delaware saw minimum wage increases in 2018 and 2019 and is scheduled to see increases in 2020 and 2021, such increases are dependent on legislation. Even with these increases, the current minimum wage still lags far behind the costs of living and there is no mechanism in place to insure that wages rise with the cost of living. Furthermore, these increases don’t apply to the hourly minimum wage for tipped employees, which is just $2.23 and hasn’t seen an increase in over 30 years. Delaware also permits a subminimum wage for workers with a disability per the Fair Labor Standards Act.

To help women and, indeed, all low-wage workers earn a living wage, OWAA recommends Delaware consider steps taken by other states as well as a living-wage model created by MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Additionally, eight states, including nearby Maryland and New Jersey, have adopted $15 an hour as their goal and passed laws or ballot initiatives implementing yearly increases to achieve
that goal by 2025 or 2026. There are also seven states that do not permit a subminimum wage for either tipped employees or those with a disability. Instead of relying on legislation, several other states automatically increase their minimum wage based on the cost of living. The MIT model uses a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family’s likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities to calculate the wage that would be needed to cover such costs. In Delaware, the living wage determined by the MIT model for one adult without any children is $12.60 per hour.\(^4\) For a single parent, the wage needed to cover basic necessities more than doubles to $26.31.\(^5\) This data makes it clear that Delaware must take meaningful steps toward a more livable wage for all its workers, including tipped employees and workers with disabilities.

Recommendation: Expand Family-Friendly Practices

Delaware increased its competitive edge as a desirable place to work with the addition of paid parental leave for state employees. Delaware employers can build on this momentum by further expanding family-friendly practices. For example, state buildings can be updated to include private, more easily accessible non-bathroom spaces for pumping breastmilk. The state can also become more family-friendly by increasing its outreach and education efforts to ensure that employees and managers understand employees’ rights and employers’ obligations regarding transitioning to and from paid parental leave, how to accommodate workers with caregiving responsibilities, and lactation accommodations.

Recommendation: Help Delawareans Save for Retirement with Delaware Earns Program

Millions of hardworking Americans do not have access to a retirement plan and roughly half of American workers do not participate in one. Many low-income workers do not have the funds to meet basic needs and therefore saving for an emergency or a future income for years down the road, simply isn’t feasible. However, Delaware can help eliminate such barriers to savings with the creation of a state-sponsored retirement plan, paid for by employees and overseen by the state. One proven option is a secure choice program, which is used in other states. These state-facilitated, universally available retirement savings plans provide a convenient way for middle-class workers to save for retirement, particularly workers who lack access to employer-sponsored plans and for small businesses that are unable to provide such a benefit.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation: Support Victims of Domestic Violence with the Creation of Advocate Privilege

Victims of domestic violence need the security of knowing information shared with advocates will remain confidential; otherwise, victims may be less likely to come forward. Delaware should ensure that advocates for victims of domestic violence cannot disclose any communication from the victim to the advocate without express written consent of the victim. At least 40 states have legislation pertaining to advocate confidentiality, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. 6

Recommendation: Help Pregnant Students Stay in School by Excusing Pregnancy-related Absences and Absences to Care for Children

Addressing the negative impact of unexcused school absences on pregnant or parenting teens can help keep these students on the path to success. Delaware can ensure that schools are providing the basic protections required under Title IX, and expand on those protections, by requiring schools to excuse absences for parents to bond with a newborn child or care for an ill child. In addition, Delaware should make clear that a student who is breastfeeding must be permitted to be excused from class to express breast milk or breastfeed.

Recommendation: Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Hair

Women of color are often disproportionately affected by grooming policies. The state can be proactive in reducing discrimination and protecting the rights of Delawareans by broadening the definition of race to include traits such as hair texture or protective hairstyles for women. Such changes can be made while still ensuring safety standards for Delaware workers.
Recommendation: Boost Wages of Low-income Workers by Making EITC Refundable

Too often Delaware families live paycheck to paycheck, without extra income to save for larger expenditures, and women, especially women of color, are disproportionately represented in low-wage work. However, refunds from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) can provide much needed supplemental income and lead to improvements in health and education outcomes, boost future social security earnings, and move families out of poverty.\(^7\) The EITC is currently refundable at the Federal level as well as in 23 states including Maryland and New Jersey.\(^8\) Making the EITC refundable for Delaware state taxes can not only alleviate poverty and support low-income working families but it encourages work and lessens reliance on social welfare programs.

OWAA welcomes input and collaboration as it continues its work. Suggestions may be directed to OWAA Director, Melanie Ross Levin, at melanie.rosslevin@delaware.gov or 302-577-8790. Visit us @DelawareWomen on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok.

De.gov/women


5  Ibid.


THE OFFICE OF WOMEN’S ADVANCEMENT & ADVOCACY

Carvel State Office Building
820. N. French Street
10th Floor
Wilmington, DE 19801

(302)-577-8970
DelawareWomen@delaware.gov

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram: @DelawareWomen

ADVOCATING FOR #DELAWAREWOMEN IS OUR BUSINESS