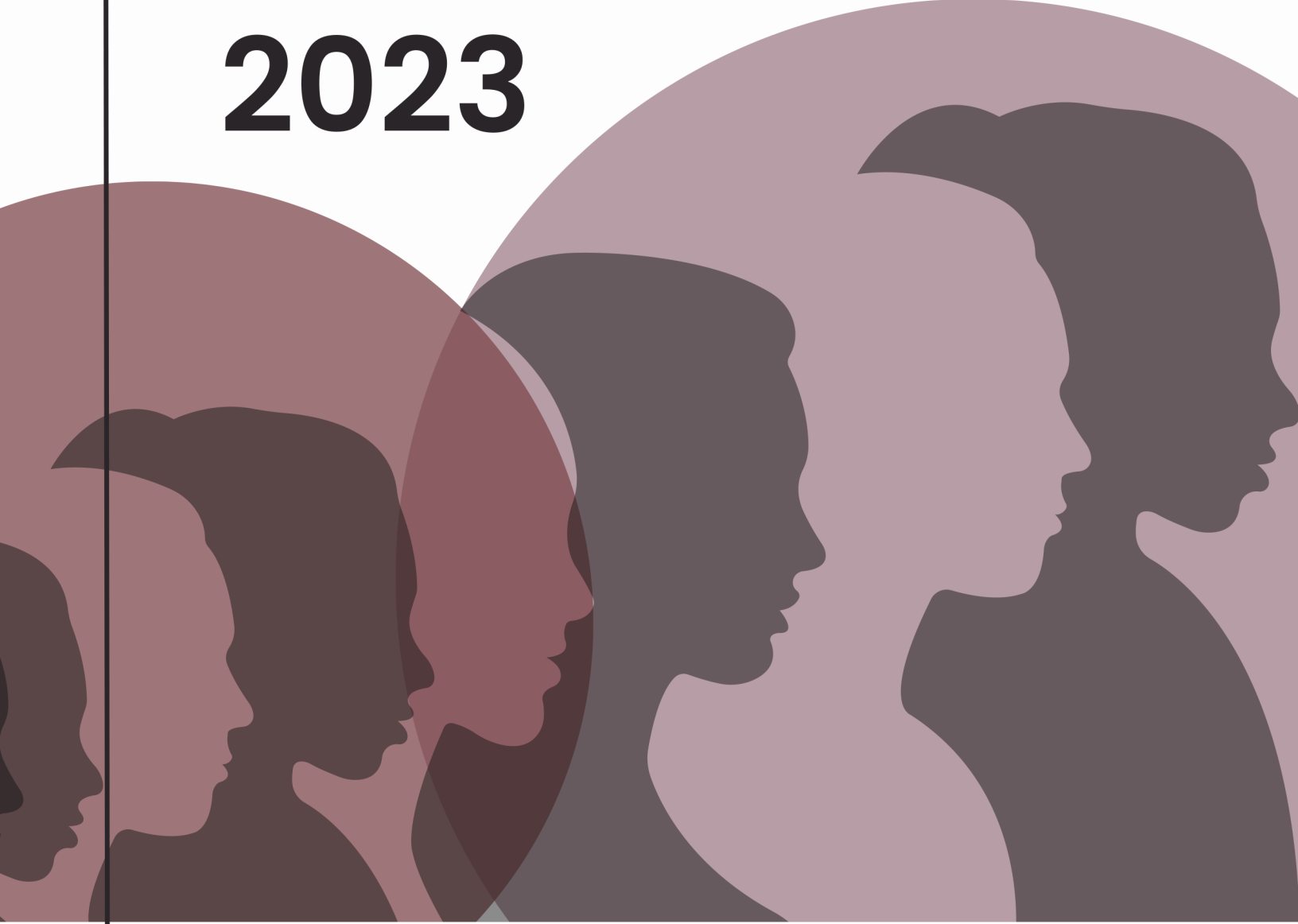
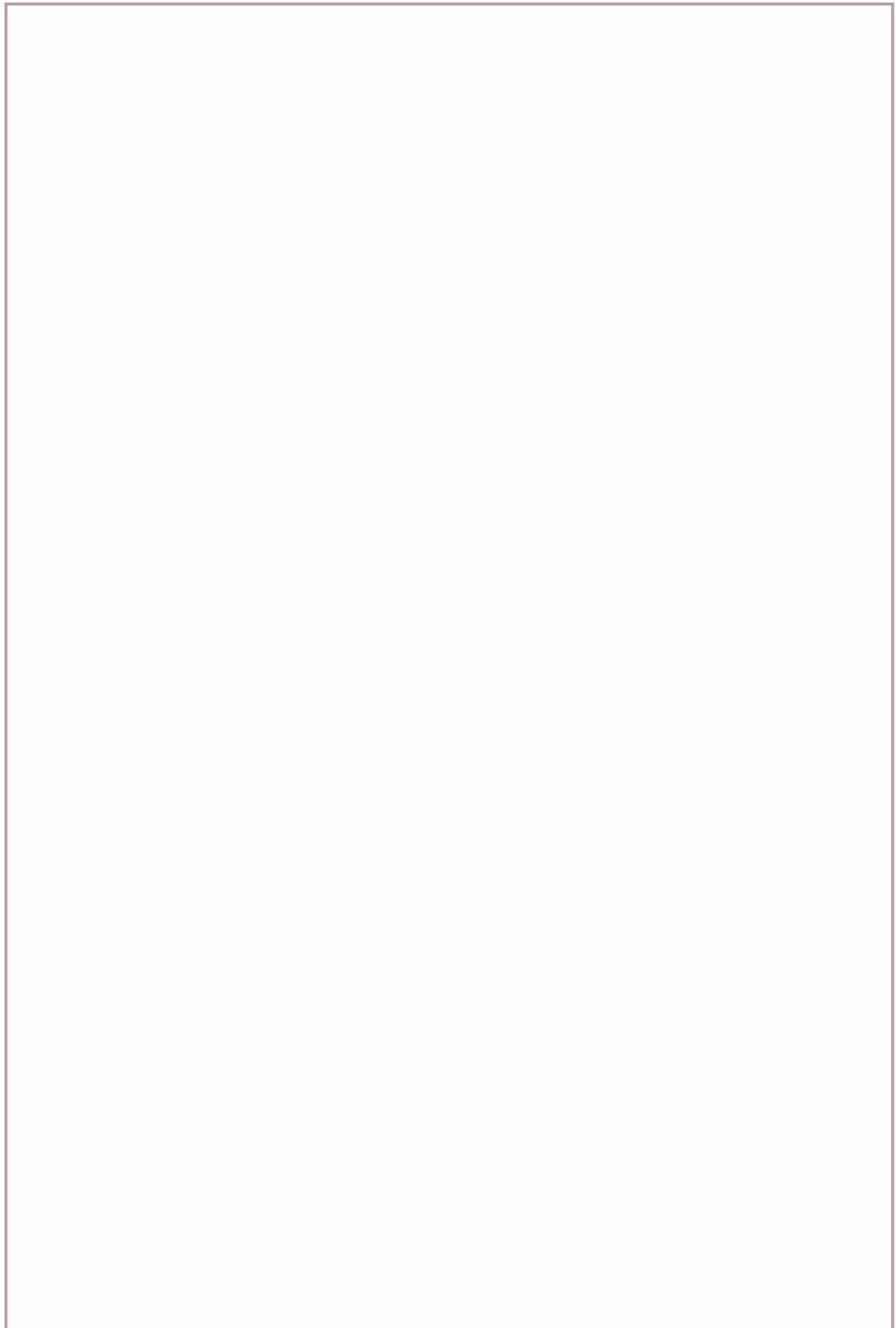




**2023**



# **FINAL REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS**



# The 2022-2023 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls

## Founder & Executive Chair

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Denise Driehaus, Hamilton County  
Commissioner

## Program Coordinator

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Mary Maune

## Steering Committee

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Denise Driehaus	Jackie O'Connell
Mary Maune	Jenifer Moore
Jenny Brady	Eileen Trauth

## Adult Members

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Awa Ba	Gina Marsh
Kari Bloom	Jill Miller
Lucrecer Braxton	Jennifer Mooney
Paula Brehm-Heeger	Ann Neuer
Rebecca Brown	Kathleen Norris
Randi Burlew, PhD	Stephanie Rivera
Dyesha Darby	Valeria Strunk
Janine Gage	Ashley Thomas
Courtney Harchaoui	Alana Tucker
Paula Lampley	

## Student Members

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Allie Cappel  
Erin Culman  
Beanie Emrick  
Gea Eshelman  
Fatima Nzale  
Regan Rivers  
Camille Roman  
Riley Soutar  
Kinsey Sullivan  
Evelyn Westrich





## 2023 Final Report & Recommendations

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# Introductions



## **Denise Driehaus**

Hamilton County Commissioner  
Founder, Hamilton County  
Commission on Women & Girls

Women and girls play an important role in our community as professionals, learners, care givers, policy makers, and more.

But real change only comes when women have a seat at the table.

In 2016, Denise Driehaus became Hamilton County's first elected woman to the Board of County Commissioners and quickly identified that need as it relates to informing policy for our community. In 2017, Commissioner Denise Driehaus, with the support of her colleagues, established The Commission on Women & Girls to help engage women and girls in Hamilton County and to elevate their voices.

In late 2021, Mary Maune began leading the Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls. In her role, she implements many of the recommendations and initiatives proposed by the Commission while continuing to lead the group's ongoing work and community building.

Each year, Commission members continue to learn about the current needs of women and girls in Hamilton County, and share their recommendations for ways that the County and other local stakeholders can work together to address them.

This opportunity offers women and girls to drive policy changes while also learning from one another, collaborating with community partners, and developing their leadership skills. By ensuring their voices are included "at the table," the Commission continues to strive to build a more equitable and thriving community for all of us.



## **Mary Maune**

Hamilton County Commission on  
Women & Girls, Program Coordinator



## **About the Commission:**

A resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) of Hamilton County, Ohio, July 19, 2017, established the volunteer Commission on Women & Girls. The Commission consists of twenty (20) women members and ten (10) student members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.

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## **The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls operates with the following purpose:**

- The Commission shall make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners and local government jurisdictions to eliminate any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field.
- The Commission shall facilitate partnerships between government, nonprofit, and business, which will support the mission of the Commission on Women & Girls.
- The Commission shall promote and encourage women to seek leadership positions in society, and help girls to develop leadership skills.
- The Commission shall develop public information and/or education campaigns to support the mission of the Commission on Women & Girls.

# Priority Areas

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The work of the Commission continues its efforts around on four main priority areas of Pay Equity, Social Mobility, Health & Self-Identity, and Safety.

Each year the Commission works to build off the previous year's list of recommendations, while also researching new challenges and opportunities to implement change.

This year's Commission worked to adjust their priorities to reflect new challenges identified while addressing the recommendations put forth by their predecessors. They've continued to engage with community partners, civic organizations, and local governments, to shed light on gaps of service, insufficient resources, and opportunities for collaboration that could lead to better outcomes for the women and girls of Hamilton County.

Through this research and community engagement, they've provided recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners, future Commissions, and the community-at-large.



## Pay Equity

Further advance pay equity efforts among businesses in Hamilton County.



## Social Mobility

Increase social & economic advancement through educational awareness and opportunity.



## Health & Self-Identity

- Increase access to no-cost menstrual products in public spaces and support legislation to provide free menstrual products in public schools in the State of Ohio.
- Increase resources and funding for youth mental health and the annual recognition of World Teen Mental Wellness Day.



## Safety

Support resources to prevent gender-based violence.

## The Hamilton County Pay Equity Commitment

The Hamilton County Pay Equity Commitment is a voluntary, employer-led initiative to help close the gender wage gap in Hamilton County.

### Who this Impacts:

The Pay Equity Commitment will continue to have a direct, positive impact on Hamilton County employers who choose to sign the commitment, their employees – particularly girls of working age, women, and those who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender-nonconforming – and the community at large.

### Why this Initiative:

The Pay Equity Committee has a resolution that was passed based on the 2021 and 2022 Pay Equity Committees. Building off of the Signing Day, we are now at a point of educating more people about the pay equity gap and how confidence can affect how people negotiate their pay.



# PAY EQUITY

## INITIATIVE:

### Pay Equity Educational Tools

### Research /Justification

According to a UK data study from Syndio, 69% of women feel anxiety or worry about negotiating pay, while half of all men feel confident. Companies who are transparent about pay are seen as progressive and making significant strides to closing the gender pay gap.

However, the confidence gap between men and women means men are twice as likely to ask for higher salaries than women. In order to put effective pay gap strategies in place, companies are required to take a holistic look at their workplace culture as well as opportunity equity.

### The study also reveals women's top feelings when it comes to negotiating are:

- 25% Fear of rejection
- 23% Lack of confidence
- 21% Being seen as "pushy" and risk of damaging their career



The study also notes women who are in senior leadership roles continue to fall in line with general trends of feeling overwhelmed with worry about negotiation. Most women over 45, cited lacking of confidence in following a negotiation through as their primary feeling. This indicates experienced women do not feel valued or empowered in the workplace.

STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) are some fields that struggle to close the gender pay gap. STEM fields tend to be male-dominated, and the confidence gap is very present in STEM fields. The confidence gap is an issue that contributes to the pay gap and slows women’s progress in STEM and perpetuates the inequalities women face in the workplace.

The study asked recent college graduates with engineering degrees to rank their performance and levels of self-efficacy when completing tasks. If a woman ranks herself low in self-efficacy, she is likely to make less in an entry-level position. With self-efficacy playing a significant role in the job application and hiring process, a woman who lacks assertiveness may not land the role she wants in her desired field.

**How Big is the Gender Pay Gap?**

On Equal Pay Day 2023 (March 14), PayScale, a compensation software, and data company, released new survey data that showed that for each \$1 earned by a white man, women earn \$0.83 when data is uncontrolled. When the data is uncontrolled, the difference across racial groups reflects the overall gender pay gap. These numbers represent the uncontrolled gender pay gap (sometimes referred to as the “opportunity pay gap”), which looks at the median salary for all men and women regardless of job type or employment characteristics.

# PAY EQUITY

In Ohio, the pay gap between white men and white and Black women is even larger. For every \$1 earned by white men, white women earn \$0.83 cents and Black women earn \$0.65 cents, according to research compiled by the Women’s Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. The table below includes breakdown of additional pay gap earnings by race and gender.

Asian-American women earned	<b>\$1.03</b>
White women earned	<b>\$0.82</b>
American Indian and Alaskan Native women earned	<b>\$0.73</b>
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander women earned	<b>\$0.72</b>
African and Black American women earned	<b>\$0.65</b>
Hispanic women earned	<b>\$0.65</b>



# PAY EQUITY

## Committee Recommendations

### Recommendations to the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners:

1

Establish an annual Pay Equity Signing Day during Women’s History Month (March).

2

Suggesting the County set an example by analyzing opportunities, such as “Lunch & Learn” to educate employers about pay equity.

### Recommendations to the 2023–2024 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls:

1

Establish working relationships and partnerships with universities and local entities (like the Women’s Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation) who actively support educating the public about pay disparities and the pay equity gap.



2

Create education toolkit that addresses the confidence gap and creates awareness of pay equity challenges and negotiation strategies.

3

Revisit previous pay equity signees to see what they have implemented or put into practice, as well as check on the effectiveness of signing the Pay Equity Commitment.

# SOCIAL MOBILITY

## INITIATIVE:

### Upward Mobility: Social & Economic Advancement Through Educational Awareness and Opportunity



#### Who this Impacts:

This initiative impacts Community Organizations, Individuals, Businesses, Political Subdivisions, Etc.

Women and Girls seeking upward mobility through college and career training; schools (high schools, colleges, community colleges); nonprofits and government entities working on workforce development; private businesses seeking a gender-diverse workforce

#### Why this Initiative:

One of the keys to today's economy continues to be a college degree or post-high school certification or training. Women experience a variety of barriers to upward mobility including lack of information about the college application process, FAFSA, and how to obtain training that will result in high-paying positions.

Economic inequality impacts ability of women and girls to take advantage of opportunities that allow for movement between social classes. This year's task force researched education and career challenges for women and girls in Hamilton County.

Ohio workers with a college degree earned nearly twice the pay of those with only a high school degree in 2021, but wage disparities persist for women and Black people at all educational levels, according to the new annual State of Working Ohio report released by Policy Matters Ohio.

In Ohio, more education also results in high pay and tends to protect workers from job loss.

**For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 13.3% of Ohio workers with less than a high school diploma lost their jobs and 10.2% remained unemployed by 2021. For college grads, 4.6% lost their jobs and 2.6% were still out of work in 2021.**



## SOCIAL MOBILITY

It is of note that the decrease in women and girls enrolling into undergraduate institutions has been much steeper (5.6%) than the decrease in boys and men enrolling into undergraduate institutions (3.8%).

This disproportionate impact points to a need for targeted intervention to return college enrollment rates for women and girls to pre-pandemic levels and beyond.

While the 2022 decrease in college enrollment is smaller than the 2021 decrease, there are emerging threats that researchers believe may have additional troubling impacts on college enrollment for women and girls in particular.

**Researchers at the Brown Center on Education Policy predict that the recent Dobbs decision by the Supreme Court, which overturned abortion rights, will have several educational consequences for women and girls, including:**

- **Reduced college enrollment, particularly for Black women; and,**
- **Fewer students enrolling in schools in anti-abortion states.**

This is due, in part, to the fact that restricting the ability to avoid unplanned births can make college enrollment difficult or impossible and to the fact that women and girls with greater access to abortion and control over when they have children tend to make larger investments in things like their education.

In addition, since 20% of college students attend out of state schools, attracting these students may become more difficult in states with more stringent abortion restrictions. The steep increase in student debt also puts a disproportionate burden on women.

**Collectively, women owe \$929 billion dollars in student loan debt which is two thirds of the nation's student debt.**

Once women and girls finish college, it takes them an average of two years longer than men to repay their student debt and they are subject to a gender pay gap which increases as they age. The financial burden of paying off student loan debt then makes it harder for women to save for retirement, buy a home, or start a business.

The burden of student debt is compounded for Black women who have to navigate the intersection of two marginalized identities and the systemic injustices associated with them, which results in Black women needing to take out more student loans and go on to jobs with lower salaries than their White counterparts.

Together, this suggests a need to support women and girls in having the support they need to obtain financial funding as they matriculate into college.

Finally, there is a need to increase the representation of women in non-traditional occupations. For example, women still lag in obtaining positions in the manufacturing and trade industries. While women make up nearly half of the American workforce, they hold only 30% of positions in manufacturing and less than 25% of the management positions in manufacturing.

Statistics by gender in many trade industries are even more stark, with men making up 90% of construction workers, 91% of electricians and more than 95% of plumbers and pipefitters in the United States<sup>6</sup>. This is particularly important to the financial stability and social mobility of women because on average, occupations in which women make up less than 25% of the workforce offer higher entry level salaries and higher pay over the course of a career.

# SOCIAL MOBILITY

## Committee Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners:



1

Encourage Superintendents to promote consistent education around gender-based violence prevention as a key to healthy relationships.

2

Celebrate school systems that are already providing quality education to prevent gender-based violence as a tool for encouraging others to do the same.

### Recommendations to the 2023–2024 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls

1

Explore the possibility of parent/teacher organizations (PTOs) or local school decision-making committees (LSDMCs) becoming involved in encouraging consistent education on prevention of gender-based violence in the school systems.

2

Explore if there are a few “model” schools that can be replicated – both in policy and in practice.

3

Consider creating partnerships with the larger Hamilton County Community to ensure that workplaces are free from gender-based violence by ensuring education on violence prevention is embedded into human resources policy, and resources to prevent gender-based violence (i.e. employee assistance programs) are available.

4

Start informing Hamilton County schools about the pending Erin’s Law, which requires schools to teach students in kindergarten through sixth grade one hour of developmentally appropriate instruction in child sex abuse prevention each school year.

# SOCIAL MOBILITY

## Committee Recommendations

2

Allocate funding to nonprofits directly supporting efforts, particularly at Title 1 schools, targeted specifically to making girls and women aware of ways to have post-high school opportunities.

3

Develop a Hamilton County Career Day in partnership with internal and external stakeholders and encourage the participation of underserved communities, including women and girls, with presentations highlighting careers and educational pathways with low female representation such as trades and STEM fields and actively coordinating awareness of this focus with high schools, community colleges, universities, and all area higher education institutions.



## Recommendations for the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners:

1

Expand access to information about the college application process, FAFSA, and Financial Support for college with a focus on connecting women/girls to alternate careers by partnering with local nonprofits, local high schools, and colleges.

## Recommendations to the Community:

1

Allocate funding to nonprofits directly supporting efforts, particularly at Title 1 schools, targeted specifically to making girls and women aware of ways to have post-high school opportunities.

2

Foster engagement of parents beyond school events to raise parental awareness about college and career training, career options, and financial planning.



## Who this Impacts:

Access to menstrual products is a necessity, and must be regarded as basic right for menstruators throughout Hamilton County, the State of Ohio, across the nation, and around the world. All menstruating persons should have equal opportunities to meaningfully engage in daily activities and participate at the same level as non-menstruating peers.

Policy and legislation that promotes no-cost menstrual products in public spaces and schools promotes health, safety, dignity, and gender equity for all.



## Why this Initiative:

Social and systemic changes are necessary to engage individuals, communities, and government in menstrual equity. The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls (HCCWG) has been working to increase awareness and promote the “menstrual movement” in meaningful and actionable ways.

In 2019, the members of HCCWG identified menstrual equity as an economic justice and public health issue, both in the region and on a larger scale. At that time, members

# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #1:

### Increase Access to No-Cost Menstrual Products in Public Spaces and Support Legislation to Provide Free Menstrual Products in Public Schools in the State of Ohio

met with state representatives to provide testimony in support of proposed legislation efforts to repeal the “Pink Tax” in the State of Ohio. This effort to remove sales taxes on menstrual hygiene products culminated in a statewide repeal in April of 2020.

In 2021, Hamilton County Board of Commissioners, in partnership with the HCCWG, unanimously passed a resolution to install and maintain no-cost menstrual product dispensers in Hamilton County buildings. As of September 2022, there are 74 dispensers installed in women’s and gender-neutral bathrooms, providing no-cost menstrual products to the Hamilton County public. The Commission has proposed recommendations to the County and community to support menstruators through education, access policy, and promotion of no-cost menstrual products in public spaces, places of business, and schools.

Hamilton County and the Board of County Commissioners are providing exemplary leadership and tangible pathways to promote menstrual equity and combat period poverty throughout the region.

Local businesses such as MadTree Brewing Company and Black Coffee Lounge are



providing no-cost menstrual products in their bathrooms, and public entities, like the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library are beginning the process for implementation.

This Commission is requesting the Board of County Commissioners further expand access to no-cost menstrual products in additional county-owned buildings including Great American Ballpark and Paycor Stadium.



In addition to regional efforts, the Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls is working with partners in the State of Ohio to promote bi-partisan support of menstrual equity policy in public schools. The proposal seeks to provide access to no-cost menstrual dispensers and products in public schools across the State of Ohio.

If passed, menstrual products would be provided in all female and gender-neutral bathrooms in Ohio public schools for students at the secondary level. This Commission is seeking formal endorsement from the Board of County Commissioners in support of this legislative effort.

## HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

### INITIATIVE #1

#### Research:

Menstrual equity seeks to provide basic health and human rights to all menstruating persons. Menstruation is a biological function that is a normal occurrence for over half of the population, therefore menstrual products are a necessity for health and wellness. In order for those who menstruate to have an equitable standing in society, one must have the ability to engage in daily activities, access necessary supplies, and have information and education on how to manage their periods. The individual and societal "cost" of menstrual inequity for menstruating persons far exceeds the monetary cost of tampons, pads, and dispensers. The consequences of these disparities can be physical, mental, emotional, and social and have lasting implications for menstruators of every age. The "cost" of shame, stigma, lack of agency, missed opportunities, and lost productivity contribute to exclusion and discrimination. The complex issues contributing can be addressed through product access and legislative action.

#### Access in Public Spaces

Public buildings and large community spaces provide ideal opportunities for furthering gender equity efforts. Menstrual products should be accessible in public spaces to those that need them. PERIOD. One simple rule for public entities to follow is if toilet paper is available at no cost, tampons or pads should also be available at no cost. By adapting free access to menstrual products in bathrooms serving the public, it demonstrates a

commitment to equity, engages the community, and provides an inclusive environment where all are welcome.

Stadiums and sports venues regularly host large numbers of the community and the impact potential of menstrual inclusive policies furthers health and wellness for all patrons. In Hamilton County, examples of large public use spaces include Great American Ballpark, home of the Cincinnati Reds, and Paycor Stadium, home of the Cincinnati Bengals.

These two venues host over 2 million fans each year (numbers reflect game attendance and do not account for additional guests for concerts and other community events). While the focus is the game itself, the fan experience is one of the core strategies for revenue and ongoing patronage. If these and other venues want to keep people engaged, happy, and entertained, then comfort and convenience should include basic hygiene supplies.

**Providing no-cost menstrual supplies helps to offset some of the obstacles attendees encounter including coin-operated dispensers in cashless spaces, bag restrictions, and compliance with The American with Disabilities Act (ADA).**

No-cost products in public spaces is a necessity and reflects the value of customers, employees, and patrons. Stadiums and sports culture often reflect societal norms of being male-dominated, exclusive, and intimidating for other patrons. Adapting menstrual equity policies in these spaces proves it is not just about the game.

## HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

### INITIATIVE #1

Organizations can create the opportunity for normalizing menstruation, combat period poverty in the community, and demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

#### Access in Schools

All students deserve the opportunity to learn, thrive, and feel supported in school. The education system provides infrastructure for funding, educational tools, and essential items for students to be successful in school. Policy and budget designations often disregard menstrual products as a necessity and are therefore not considered “allowable” expenses. It is time that tampons and pads are provided for in the same way as toilet paper and soap ensuring bathrooms meet the needs of all students. Access to menstrual products enables students to attend class, reduces period poverty, and fosters gender equity.

Students are especially vulnerable to menstrual inequity.

One in four students do not have access to period products on a regular basis, and

more than half of students report not being able to afford products at least once during the school year.

Lack of menstrual supplies directly affects attendance and absenteeism.

If period products are not readily available, students are subject to performance gaps, social disengagement, isolation, and reduced ability to focus and engage in the classroom.

**80%**

of teens have reported missing class time or knew someone who had missed school due to not having the necessary products while menstruating.

Recent reports demonstrate the positive attitude students have towards menstrual equity initiatives. More than 80% of students view menstrual products as necessary as toilet paper and should be provided at no-cost in bathrooms. Students are eager to learn more about periods, want to reduce the stigma associated with menstruation, and want to shift cultural and social attitudes towards it. It is essential that we as a society foster open dialogue and self-determination for all students, menstruators and non-menstruators alike.

### **Period Policy**

Policy change and advocacy must focus on basic necessities, dignity, and equity in the bathroom and beyond.

Traditional policies cause or worsen inequities by imposing sales tax on products, exclusion of menstrual products from public health benefit programs, and not making products uniformly available in institutions like

## **HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY**

### **INITIATIVE #1**

public schools, prisons, homeless shelters, and the workplace. Health and safety, equitable education, productivity, and achievement are at risk for all menstruators until these policies are addressed.

Menstrual equity bills are being introduced at all levels of government across the nation with more than 140 bills across 37 states. Over 30 bills have been passed to increase access to menstrual products in the past two years targeting schools, grant programs, correctional facilities, homeless shelters, and public buildings. Fifteen states and Washington DC have passed legislation to ensure students who menstruate have access to period products while in schools. While these states vary on requirements, it demonstrates encouraging progress towards broader gender equity and inclusion for all. The State of Ohio has passed the repeal of "Pink Tax" and is currently working to add its name to the list of states providing no-cost menstrual products in public schools.

Hamilton County and the Board of County Commissioners has continuously recognized menstruation as a natural occurrence and menstrual products as basic necessities, essential to an individual's health and safety. The County is providing no-cost products in its buildings and thus carving the path towards a more equitable community. This Commission requests that the County formally endorse legislation that promotes access to menstrual products at no-cost in public schools. In doing so, Hamilton County sends a clear message of action, equity, and inclusion to the greater community and the State of Ohio.



## Recommendations for the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners:

**1** Promote and expand the installation and distribution of menstrual product dispensers and no-cost menstrual products in bathrooms located in public buildings owned by Hamilton County, including but not limited to, Great American Ballpark and Paycor Stadium.

**2** Formally endorse legislation and policy that promotes access to no-cost menstrual products in public schools across the State of Ohio.



## Recommendations to the Community:

**1** Provide information to private and public entities regarding practices that further period equity, such as providing no-cost menstrual products in bathrooms for customers, employees, and visitors.

## HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

### INITIATIVE #1:

## Committee Recommendations

**2** Engage businesses and local entities currently providing no-cost menstrual products in buildings to explore best practices and execution of menstrual product distribution in bathrooms.

**3** Explore partnerships with menstrual health organizations providing menstrual products and education to expand menstrual health and equity programming across Hamilton County.

**4** Encourage Cincinnati Public Schools and districts across the county to increase wellness programs and education to students, caretakers, and employees focused on menstrual health and hygiene.

## Recommendations to the 2023-2024 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls:

1

Formalize a working group of representatives from across Hamilton County for increasing participation in menstrual equity efforts led by the Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls as approved in the 2022 resolution passed by the Board of County Commissioners;

- Host an information session or workshop with local entities such as the City of Cincinnati and other municipalities within the County.
- Include agencies with established implementation and successful menstrual health equity initiatives.



## HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

### INITIATIVE #1:

## Committee Recommendations

2

Advocate for menstrual health and hygiene education in Hamilton County schools for all students, regardless of gender identity.

3

Create a "Menstrual Equity Pledge" in congruence with the "Pay Equity Commitment" calling for businesses, non-profits, and other entities to provide access to no-cost menstrual products in bathrooms at their place of business.

4

Ensure the continuation of inclusive language in all menstrual equity initiatives, publications, reports, and meetings in which Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls participates and produces.



## HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

### INITIATIVE #2:

#### Increase Resources and Funding for Youth Mental Health and the Annual Recognition of World Teen Mental Wellness Day



Prioritizing youth mental health is critical to the wellness and vitality of the greater Hamilton County community. The financial support and allocation of resources to mental health programs and agencies will demonstrate a meaningful commitment to the growing mental health concerns of youth and teens across our region. Crisis intervention, policy, advocacy, and collective action is required to ensure a prosperous future for Hamilton County and its young residents. World Teen Mental Wellness Day on March 2 is a Global Day of Recognition to increase awareness, demonstrate support, and address youth and teen mental health. Hamilton County will recognize the day as an annual event and support activities across the county.

#### Who this Impacts:

Adolescents across all demographics are facing a mental health crisis. All young residents in Hamilton County deserve quality programs, targeted support, resource allocation, and increased access to mental health services. A meaningful investment in our youth today will promote stronger and healthier adults in the future.

#### Why this Initiative:

The mental health of youth and young adults in Hamilton County and across our nation is essential for the long-term wellness of our global society. Adolescence is a crucial time in developing positive social and emotional habits impacting an individual across their lifetime. The consequences of poor mental health and exposure to trauma during childhood and young adulthood can have detrimental effects across the lifespan. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, national health organizations consider youth mental health to be in a state of crisis due to its high prevalence and worsening conditions across all genders, races, and ethnic groups. We as a county and community have the responsibility to take swift and meaningful action against this growing crisis.

The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls (HCCWG) has demonstrated its strong commitment to improving mental health across the

# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

region through a multifaceted approach. Past initiatives have included a public health campaign aimed at awareness and recommendations to improve access to mental health resource information across school districts. In 2022, the Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution to allocate American Rescue Plan Assistance (ARPA) funds to organizations and programs working to address mental health and included a specific designation for youth mental health. The resolution also dedicated March 2, 2023 a day of recognition for World Teen Mental Wellness and provided the youth and teens of Hamilton County an opportunity to promote mental health and increase peer to peer support.

This year, the recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners, community, and to the future members of HCCWG represent an ongoing pledge to the young residents of Hamilton County. Due to the demonstrated impact of the resolution passed last year, the 2023 initiative focuses on two main strategies for supporting mental health in funding and awareness.

To date, the Board of County Commissioners has awarded over \$7.2 million towards mental health service initiatives through ARPA funding, levies, and grants. This initiative encourages continued funding from Hamilton County, targeting mental health resources, agencies, and programs supporting youth mental health, to ensure sustainability of these efforts. The initiative also acts to proclaim Teen Mental Wellness Day an annual dedication to mental health promotion and civic action for youth and young adults across the county.

## Research:

**The Current Crisis.** Pre-teen and teenage development is a time of significant vulnerability and the impact of negative experiences are intensified. The consequences of poor health and exposure to adverse risk factors have serious implications on health and wellness. Poor mental health can increase social isolation, discrimination, stigma, and risky health behaviors, while worsening existing disparities. Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

**Approximately one in six US youth (ages 6–17) experience a mental health disorder and nearly half of all mental health disorders begin before the age of 14.**

In 2023, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published data from The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Data Summary and Trends Report: 2011–2021, which provides an analysis of health behaviors and experiences among high school students in the US. The YRBS report is the first to compare trends from before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results demonstrate that many of the behaviors and experiences already trending in the wrong direction prior to the pandemic continued to worsen. Students across all racial and ethnic groups reported high and worsening levels of persistent sadness or hopelessness-



# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

ness with nearly 40% feeling so sad or hopeless they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks or more. Increases were noted in the percentage of youth who seriously considered suicide, made a suicide plan, and attempted suicide. In the US, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among youth age 10-14 and the 3rd leading cause of death among 15-24 year old's.

The national data reflects a mental health crisis for young people across the United States and demonstrates the universality of poor mental health experiences and growing disparities. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Hospital Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have declared a National State of Emergency in children's mental health.

The US Surgeon General called attention to the urgency of this public health issue by releasing the Advisory on Youth Mental Health in recognition of the unprecedented challenges faced by adolescents and young adults.



The rippling effects of this crisis can be seen throughout Hamilton County. Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) posted an alert in January of this year for a high volume of patients presenting with mental health concerns across all campuses.

CCHMC and hospitals across the country have reported an increase in emergency room visits for children and teenagers struggling with mental health conditions including worsening depression, anxiety, unsafe behaviors, and suicidal ideation.

Local resources and community mental health organizations are struggling to meet the increasing demands which leads to longer wait times for services, delays treatment, and can lead to further illness.



Talbert House, a local community support agency, collaborates with and supports the National 988 Crisis and Suicide Prevention Line acting as the 988 provider for Hamilton County and one of 12 national backup providers. Early demographic data from the organization notes that the largest group of callers is between 30 and 45 years of age and 30% of those callers are seeking assistance for their child.

# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

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**Gender and Identity Gap.** Female identifying teens and individuals that identify in minority subgroups, such as LGBTQ+, are particularly vulnerable to mental health concerns and are experiencing poor mental health at a disproportionate level to that of their peers.

**Teenage girls are in the midst of the worst mental health decline in a decade with almost 60% reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and nearly one third have seriously considered taking their lives.**

That is nearly twice as high as male students surveyed. Female students were more likely to feel disconnected from their peers, experience bullying, miss school due to safety concerns, and misuse substances (vapor products, prescription drugs, marijuana, and alcohol). Approximately one in five female students have experienced sexual violence and 15% have been forced to have sex.

LGBTQ+ students are faring even worse across key indicators of mental health and are more likely to experience higher levels of stress at school, from peers, and in the home. Half of all gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning teens report struggling with their mental health. Close to 70% of these students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, the highest level for the data category. One in four LGBTQ+

students were bullied at school and are significantly more likely to experience all forms of violence.

**Take Action.** When we develop coordinated strategies to combat the youth mental health crisis, we must consider the implications of current societal, environmental, and cultural factors facing today's generation of young people. Social media, climate change, racial injustice, gender inequality, economic instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic have only exacerbated an already stressed population. These same issues can help guide policy, program development, and supportive infrastructures to directly address the plague on youth mental health.

Adolescents should act and serve as partners in planning and implementing programs allowing them to engage in meaningful ways to promote mental health. Student-led initiatives can increase the impact of resources, skill development, policy, and education. Who better to lead the effort to improve mental health than the very people it is affecting?

Schools should be considered a primary focus for implementing mental health support and act as a gateway to services and community sources of care. Local students at Anderson High School conducted a research study to "add students' voices to the data on school based mental health resources." They discovered less than half of the students surveyed were aware of support offered outside of school counselors and many were not comfortable accessing these resources. Students provided guidance for mental health support including a required mental health

# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

class, anonymous referrals for at-risk students, mental well-being counselors, and daily mental health time. Students have a voice and it is more important than ever to listen.

Every adolescent deserves to go to a school that gives them the foundation for making healthy decisions, provides them with a safe and supportive environment, and acts as a center for connection. Quality health education, access to health and mental health services, anti-harassment policies, identified safe spaces and allies, and evidenced based programming are essential. Tool-kits and implementation guides such as the Sources of Strength Program from IN5 and the Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) initiative from the World Health Organization can support students and educators when developing mental health programs.

Action should focus on equitable, inclusive, gender-sensitive policies that directly address risk factors at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. The cost of failure and complacency are too high for the present and future stability of our community. We must unite in action to ensure all of the young residents in Hamilton County are valued and protected.

### Local Impact and Accomplishments

#### American Rescue Plan Act Funds.

The Board of County Commissioners, in alignment with the direction and investments allocated by President Biden recognize the positive impact and importance of funding mental health

support services and resources at the federal, state, and county levels. Specifically, the Board of County Commissioners has allocated funds from local levies, grants, and the American Rescue Plan Act providing support Teen Suicide Prevention, Youth Resiliency, to the Mental Health Recovery Services to expand the Mobile Crisis Unit to 24/7 availability, and support foster care children and youth in the “Beyond Your Imagination” program. While the value for immediate impact is clear, the life-saving interventions and support from this funding is exponential and will positively impact Hamilton County residents for generations to come.

The Board of County Commissioners has allocated funds from local levies, grants, and the American Rescue Plan Act providing:

\$516,700 to support Teen Suicide Prevention Grants

\$1.5 million to support Youth Resiliency Grants

\$5 million to the Mental Health Recovery Services to expand the Mobile Crisis Unit to 24/7 availability

\$250,000 to support foster care children and youth in the “Beyond Your Imagination” program

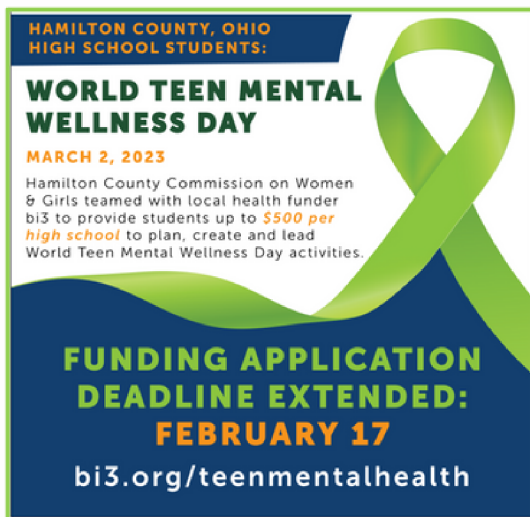


# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

The Board of County Commissioners, in partnership with the Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls, proclaimed March 2, 2023 as Teen Mental Wellness Day in Hamilton County, Ohio.

The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls partnered with local health funder bi3 to support student-led activities aimed at reducing stigma, promoting mental health resources in schools and communities, and increasing peer to peer support.



bi3 awarded \$500 grants to eleven schools across the County to recognize and take action for Teen Mental Wellness Day. Student initiatives included awareness campaigns for the National 988 crisis line, mental health assemblies, wellness stations and spaces, stress relief kits, guest speakers, guided journaling, a short film for mental health support, and promoting healthy behaviors.

# Teen Mental Wellness Day March 2, 2023



When young people plan, implement, and design programming, it increases connectedness and inclusiveness while driving progress toward improved youth mental health.

If you or someone you know is in emotional distress or crisis, you can reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988.



# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

### Committee Recommendations



### Recommendations to the Community:

#### Recommendations for the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners:

**1** Recommend, offer support, and encourage funds continue to be allocated to increase mental health resources and support existing agencies and programs across Hamilton County, particularly those focused on improving mental health in youth and teens across the County.

**2** Recognize and support activities for World Teen Mental Wellness Day on March 2 as an annual day of awareness for Hamilton County high schools and teen organizations; Explore sustainable funding partners, community partnerships, and broaden reach to increase participation and continue the grant opportunities initiated by bi3 for promoting and expanding World Teen Mental Wellness Day in 2022.

**1** Encourage all professionals working with vulnerable populations to complete training in trauma informed care, especially those professionals working within schools or with youth populations.

**2** Collaborate with local non-profit organizations and community agencies, schools, recreation centers, etc., to provide marketing campaigns that increase awareness for 988 and mental health resources.

**3** Collaborate with Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls to recognize and celebrate World Teen Mental Wellness Day and other mental health awareness days.

# HEALTH & SELF-IDENTITY

## INITIATIVE #2:

### Committee Recommendations

1

Collaborate with local schools and mental health agencies to further recognize mental wellness initiatives and World Teen Mental Wellness Day;

- Maximize the young adult members (and former student alumni) of the Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls to increase participation in World Teen Mental Wellness Day celebrations.
- Consider collaboration with non-school based teen organizations and spaces for possible celebration participation (i.e. libraries, recreation centers, teen focused non-profits like Girls Health Period or Girls to Women).
- Explore funding partners, like bi3, to provide schools with mini grants to fund student-led activities at their schools on March 2.
- Create list of community experts, wellness coaches, health professionals, and speakers that would be willing to participate in activities to share with schools.

2

Consider a social media campaign that highlights the high schools who participated in World Teen Mental Wellness Day on March 2, 2023.

4

Promote mental health campaigns in Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) and districts across Hamilton County to create student led organizations and projects to increase awareness and promote mental health and access to resources for students and caretakers.

### Recommendations to the 2023-2024 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls:

3

Identify local public policies that serve as a barrier to improving youth mental health and the health of our Hamilton County Community, e.g. [www.cityhealth.org](http://www.cityhealth.org)

4

Meet with school officials across the county to partner with the HCCWG on future resolutions, recommendations, and mental health programming.

5

Expand and continue the social media campaign previously created by the HCCWG in 2021 which promotes mental health and wellness for women of all ages across Hamilton County.



## SAFETY

### INITIATIVE:

### Supporting Resources To Prevent Gender-Based Violence in Hamilton County

#### Who this Impacts:

This initiative impacts Schools, Individuals, Community Organizations, Individuals, etc.

#### Why this Initiative:

In 2010, The state of Ohio implemented the Tina Croucher Act. This legislation requires public schools to incorporate dating violence into their policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying, and to require school districts to include dating violence prevention education in the health curriculum.

#### Research & Justification:

Females ages 16-19 are 4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault. Given this reality, our Safety Sub-Committee conducted research on how consistently a gender-based violence prevention curriculum is applied at local high schools. Through our research, we found discrepancies as to which schools were believed to be providing this education and which ones

are actually doing it. There are various curricula that schools might be using, variations in the amount of education provided, and inconsistent awareness that this is a requirement in Ohio public schools, as a result of the Tina Croucher Act.

As the Committee began its journey this session, we initially sought to expand this education into public as well as private school settings, including at least one boys-only school. However, as the Committee explored what was currently happening in schools they thought were already engaged in this work, they discovered that the issues were more about inconsistent policies, lack of understanding of the education, and who is responsible for its implementation.

In a recent conversation with Cincinnati Public Schools Administration about dating violence prevention education, they indicated the importance of building a partnership between the curriculum team within district and the teachers and students to help build positive school culture and climate. They stated they believe this education, along with follow-up strategies to make it come alive to students,



are integral parts to this conversation. In Hamilton County, several organizations provide dating violence prevention education, such as Women Helping Women (WHW), the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati (YWCA), and Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio.

**Importantly, in 2022, the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners allocated \$500K from the Child Services Levy to ensure that agencies who offer this programming are able to meet the capacity of serving all high schools in Hamilton County at no cost to the school systems.**

#### Women Helping Women (WHW)

WHW focuses on gender-based violence prevention education (Prevent and Empower) in grades 7 – 12. As part of this effort, WHW provides this program to 10 schools in CPS, as well as schools throughout the region.

**In 2022, WHW trained 3,867 students. WHW has been expanding the number of schools receiving this education, and the intent is to reach at least 5,000 youths every year.**

The goal is to bring more awareness and visibility so that all schools and leadership know about the resource, rather than relying on individual school contacts.

## SAFETY

Importantly, WHW has students complete a survey after the curriculum is taught, and the resulting information is quite valuable.

For example, their most recent school surveys revealed that 93% of students report they feel confident identifying signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships, and 89% feel confident using bystander intervention strategies to intervene in harmful situations. The biggest differences in survey responses are that self-identified males will respond more confidently to their knowledge/understanding than they did in the pre-survey.



As for self-identified female participants, they tend to offer more comprehensive responses regarding what else they want to learn. Significantly, this sometimes involves self-disclosure about being in unhealthy/abusive relationships or supporting friends whom they believe are in this situation, and they are seeking more ways to take action. The Committee's research found that some schools seemed to be only vaguely aware of these survey results.

Interviews with WHW indicated that to support program growth, the organization has recently hired one additional full-time educator, and three contractors, and has plans for one more full-time educator and several more contractors.

**YWCA of Greater Cincinnati (YWCA)**

In Hamilton County, the YWCA completed a "Safe Dates" education program at four Cincinnati Public Schools in 2022. The program reached 1,096 students at these schools between the ages of 12-19. Fifty-five percent (55%) of participating students were male, 45% were female.

The YWCA has "Margaret's Place" at Riverview East Academy. Margaret's Place is a "safe space" where youth can speak with a counselor about domestic violence or other types of violence and abuse that they or someone they know may be experiencing. This includes workshops for youth, resources for parents and families, and free confidential individual and group counseling for students in grades 7 – 12. In 2022, Margaret's Place served 107 students between the ages of 13-19 years old.



# SAFETY

Last, the YWCA implements the Coaching Boys Into Men (CBIM) violence prevention program for athletic coaches. This program is designed to inspire coaches to teach their young male athletes about the importance of respect for themselves, others, and particularly women and girls. Over the course of an athletic season, CBIM coaches lead their players through brief weekly activities that address themes, such as personal responsibility, respectful behavior, and relationship abuse. Teams are encouraged to involve fans, parents, faculty, other students, and school administrators in support of CBIM's respect message.

**Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio (PPSWO)**

Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio shared its curriculum (Get Real), with the Committee as well. Its program is broader than gender-based violence prevention, but includes this component as a part of healthy relationships.

However, after further exploration, PPSWO indicated the "customer" typically selects which elements they want provided, in a menu-style. Thus, there is no guarantee that the violence prevention/healthy relationships component is included every time.



## Recommendations for the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners:

1

Encourage superintendents to promote consistent education around gender-based violence prevention as a key to healthy relationships.

2

Celebrate school systems that are already providing quality education to prevent gender-based violence as a tool for encouraging others to do the same.

## SAFETY

## Committee Recommendations

## Recommendations to the 2023–2024 Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls:

1

Explore the possibility of parent/teacher organizations (PTOs) or local school decision-making committees (LSDMCs) becoming involved in encouraging consistent education on prevention of gender-based violence in the school systems.

2

Exploring if there are a few “model” schools that can be replicated – both in policy and in practice.

3

Start informing Hamilton County schools about the pending Erin’s Law, which requires schools to teach students in kindergarten through sixth grade one hour of developmentally appropriate instruction in child sex abuse prevention each school year.

4

Considering creating partnerships with the larger Hamilton County Community (businesses, employers, citizens, non-profits, etc.) to ensure that workplaces are free from gender-based violence by ensuring education on violence prevention is embedded into human resources policy, and there are resources to prevent gender-based violence (i.e. employee assistance programs).



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# Acknowledgements

## **A special thanks to our supporters, community partners, and collaborators:**

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bi3  
Cincinnati Public Schools  
Audrey Baker, Student at Anderson High School  
Nancy Eigel-Miller, Founder and Executive Director of IN5  
Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio  
Amy Rohling McGee, Health Policy Institute of Ohio  
Alexander Rulon, Director of Community Care  
Susan Shelton, Executive Director MindPeace  
Neil Tilow, CEO Talbert House  
Women Helping Women  
Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation  
YWCA of Greater Cincinnati

## **Special Recognition for bi3 grant fund recipients and all student participants in World Teen Mental Health Day:**

St. Ursula Academy  
Reading Jr./Sr. High School  
Madeira High School  
Walnut Hill High School  
Northwest High School  
Anderson High School  
Dohn Community High School  
St. Xavier High School  
Riverview East Academy  
Mercy McAuley High School  
Robert A Taft High School

