



**LUKE A. BRONIN**  
Mayor

# CITY OF HARTFORD

Office of Equity & Opportunity  
550 Main Street, Suite 303  
Hartford, Connecticut 06103  
P: (860) 757-9789  
F: (860) 722-6571  
[www.hartford.gov](http://www.hartford.gov)



**KAREN TAYLOR**  
Director of Equity & Opportunity

## **PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF HARTFORD WOMEN (PCSHW) SPECIAL MEETING**

*Hartford Women's Economic Security Forum*

Monday, September 27, 2021  
5pm – 6:30pm

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. Call to Order at 5:02pm**

#### **2. Roll Call**

- a. Chair Shannon Kula, Vice Chair Janée Folston, Secretary Haben Abraham, Commissioners Sharon Pope, Erica Crowley, Melinda Johnson, Jillian Davey, City Staff Kimberly Taylor

#### **3. Approval of Minutes**

- a. n/a

#### **4. Hartford Women's Economic Security Forum**

##### **a. Six panelists testifying in attendance:**

Mr. Fred Wergeles  
Director, Entrepreneurial Center and Women's Business Center  
University of Hartford  
O: 860-408-9093  
E: [wergeles@hartford.edu](mailto:wergeles@hartford.edu)

Ms. Janée Woods Weber  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund's (CWEALF)  
O: 860-610-6057  
E: [jwoodsweber@cwealf.org](mailto:jwoodsweber@cwealf.org)


Ms. Lena Rodriguez  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Community Renewal Team, Inc.  
Asst: Marisa Walls  
O: 860-560-5610  
E: [lenar@crtct.org](mailto:lenar@crtct.org)


Ms. Paula S. Gilberto  
President and CEO  
United Way of Central and Northeastern CT  
O: 860-493-6800  
E: [pgilberto@unitedwayinc.org](mailto:pgilberto@unitedwayinc.org)

Ms. Jamey Bell, J.D.  
Executive Director  
Greater Hartford Legal Aid  
O: 860-541-5000  
E: [jbell@ghla.org](mailto:jbell@ghla.org)

Ms. Erin Kemple, J.D.  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Fair Housing Center  
O: 860-247-4400  
E: [erin@ctfairhousing.org](mailto:erin@ctfairhousing.org)

## b. Invitation









 **PCSHW**  
Permanent Commission on the  
Status of Hartford Women

**Virtual Women's Economic Forum**

**Join Us!**

**Together We Can Make A Difference**

**This forum provides the opportunity to learn more about the COVID-19 economic impact on the lives of Hartford women and what steps we can take to make a difference.**

**ZOOM details:**  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84829311656>

**Monday September 27, 2021  
5:00pm – 7:00pm**

**c. Chairwoman Kula's opening summary:**

In our community, women, girls, people of color, and lower-wage earners suffer significant health and economic disparities that must be addressed if we are to improve our city and advance all its residents. The impact of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in Hartford while also expanding this population to include the thousands who have lost jobs, homes, incomes, education opportunities, child care, health care, endured food insecurity and experienced domestic violence.

The Virtual *Hartford Women's Economic Security Forum* aims to hear directly from community providers and advocates about the current state of women and girls as we continue to experience the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and develop what more we can do together to make a difference in their day-to-day lives and their future ahead.

**d. Panel 1: Economic Opportunity**

Mr. Fred Wergeles, University of Hartford Entrepreneurial Center & Women's Business Center

The Center has had over 1,000 small businesses – 75% women, 50% minority – flourish utilizing state, federal and private funding for capital.

PPP federal funding as well as local programs generated \$3M.

Trends we are seeing: niche markets are uncompetitive and increased value on customer service such as curbside pickup options.

Ms. Janée Woods Weber, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund's (CWEALF)

CWEALF has seen COVID recovery stalled for those most impacted in Hartford. In Hartford food insecurity and affordable housing needs have grown for women – especially black, Latina and Spanish-speaking women. Urging support for Hero Pay, Pandemic sick pay, childcare and preschool funding, and an increase in the minimum wage to help level the playing field. Further, CWEALF sees that taxes are restrictive with top earners policies that must change.

**e. Panel 2: Childcare**

Ms. Lena Rodriguez, Community Renewal Team, Inc.

CRT serves Greater Hartford and Middlesex for a total of 44 towns. In 2020, 29K women and girls with 28% women led households. Key areas urging support are school readiness and behavioral health programs where there is great need. Challenges experiencing are two-fold: sufficient staffing for children programming and hiring is difficult due to the lack of competitive pay. Given that 98% of staffing for these programs are women, this underscores the challenges for women to not only earn a living wage where the pandemic brought heightened awareness of basic needs not being met – food, clothing, housing.

In addition, they have seen a 100% increase in the need for mental health services for ages 18 years and younger.

**Ms. Paula S. Gilberto, United Way of Central and Northeastern CT**

UW of Central and Northeastern CT encompasses 52 communities and easily one million people. Pre-pandemic, 38% of CT women were not earning enough to make ends meet and in Hartford alone, it was 64% who were not earning enough to make ends meet. Key areas of concern exacerbated by the pandemic are:

- quality early childhood education – pre-pandemic CT was short 50K spots, 1/3 of all towns have insufficient space
- access and affordable childcare – significant “childcare deserts” hindering child development but hard to retain staff.

Housing and childcare together account for at least 50% of household budgets. Our workforce needs childcare. Data shows two adults with two preschoolers need to earn \$45/hour to pay for basic needs.

f. Panel 3: Housing

**Ms. Jamey Bell, J.D., Greater Hartford Legal Aid**

Race and gender are key demographics for understanding the need for assistance in Hartford. Key areas of concern GHCLA, 40% of children in poverty, highest in the nation. Pandemic 2020 saw evictions of concern, lack of safe and sanitary housing, increased numbers of restraining orders and divorce. Violence and housing stability is of particular concern when landlords can evict because of violence which disproportionately disadvantages women who are then victims twice.

**Ms. Erin Kemple, J.D., Connecticut Fair Housing Center**

Key areas of concern for Hartford include: as federal eviction moratorium expires evictions will dramatically rise, more disability rates for women, women seeing discrimination when “lawful income” such as Section 8 results in denials for housing. 95% of evictions are in just five zip codes.

g. Q&A

Q: Vice Chair Folston -- What areas can improve pay equity and job opportunities to expand childcare?

A: Lena Rodriguez – Local and state funding decision makers can be more deliberate in grants, CRT has classes in early childhood education for apprenticeship program to advance necessary certification to fill jobs.

Q: Commissioner Pope – How can we elevate Hartford women, jobs, education?

A: Lena Rodriguez – examine public dollars and ask if municipalities are coming together and coordinating for effectiveness?

A: Erin Kemple – Require any contract, any business doing work with the city to pay a living wage and this can address shortage of paraprofessionals for example and lift the women who are in these jobs.

A: Jamey Bell: Tie health care to employers.

Q: Commissioner xx – What have municipalities done thus far?

A: Erin Kemple – Look to areas where minorities have been impacted and for ex, the City of New London paved a largely African American neighborhood and now are looking to compensate those individuals who were displaced.

A: Lena Rodriguez – Encourage the city to have living wage stipulations in their contracts, examine childcare and transportation needs.

A: Jamey Bell: Examine where women held convictions can get records pardoned to facilitate employment.

#### **h. Public Discussion**

Comments shared:

- Thank you for bringing this panel together and raising awareness of needs in our city.
- Thank you for the examples of key areas where Hartford women are struggling to achieve economic equity and security.

#### **i. Closing Remarks: Chairwoman Kula**

Thank you all for joining us on our first virtual forum, sharing your experiences and work on behalf of Hartford women.

#### **5. Special Announcement by Commissioner Crowley**

- a. Video recording of this forum will be available at: [meetinginfo.org](http://meetinginfo.org)
- b. Our next forum, Hartford Women's Health & Security Forum will take place virtually on Monday, October 25, 2021, 5-6:30pm

#### **6. Meeting Adjourned at 6:45pm**