

Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour
Baltimore City
AFSCME Building
1410 Bush Street, Baltimore, Maryland
October 23, 2017 ♦ 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

The Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour traveled to the heart of Baltimore on a beautiful autumn evening in Maryland's largest city. There, a group of thirty-six gathered to discuss the concerns of women in this community. The public forum was organized as a partnership between Baltimore City Council Vice President Sharon Green Middleton and the Maryland Commission for Women and was very generously hosted by AFSCME Maryland.

The attendees at the forum included individuals, representatives of women's and community advocacy organizations, service providers and public officials including state Senator Barbara Robinson and Baltimore City State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby. They articulately identified a wide range of issues and challenges for the women of Baltimore City, selected five they thought were most important, and discussed possible remedies.

The evening began with welcoming remarks by Councilwoman Middleton, followed by State's Attorney Mosby, who discussed issues surrounding prosecution of sex offenders. It quickly became an open forum on many of the challenges facing women in this large metropolitan city.

As the forum progressed, Councilwoman Middleton noted that presently there is no Commission for Women active in Baltimore City as there is in 15 of Maryland's other jurisdictions. The group voted unanimously that this should be its top priority – the re-establishment of a Commission for Women in Baltimore City so that there will be an organization whose specific focus is on addressing the challenges discussed at this evening's forum. The participants then listed a total of 19 challenges facing the women of Baltimore City. Each participant was given five "votes" to place beside the issues she or he considered most important. From that process, five were selected as the top priorities. Interestingly, the top four were all tied for first place.

The group then identified actions that could be taken to address each of the "top five" issues:

1. Too few women in elected office

- a. Provide training for women in political engagement
- b. Women's advocacy groups should support women candidates

2. Need for transitional services for girls "aging out" of foster care

- a. Provide more funding for transitional housing
- b. Develop services that provide consistent support over several years as children transition from dependent teens to self-sufficient adults
- c. Involve adult former foster children in any services developed

- 3. Lack of education on independent living skills and economic empowerment**
 - a. Consider reinstating the Survival Skills I and II curriculum in the public schools
 - b. Teach financial literacy in the schools and in the community for adults
 - c. Offer courses for entrepreneurial women on how to establish and run their own businesses
 - d. Teach nutrition and healthy eating and grocery shopping practices
 - e. Teach basic non-technical skills such as cursive writing

- 4. Need for more transparency in the state legislative process**
 - a. Provide civic education that includes “how a bill becomes a law” and how citizens may influence that process
 - b. Encourage greater community involvement and fund those programs
 - c. The new Commission for Women, when it is established, should offer programs on legislative advocacy
 - d. Make the legislative process in Annapolis more accessible – including through the use of technology

- 5. Special challenges facing older women**
 - a. Acknowledge their needs; make their issues a priority
 - b. Respect their contributions
 - c. The new Commission for Women, when it is established, should invite representatives of the Office on Aging and the Commission on Aging to provide briefings at its meetings
 - d. Provide funding to the Community College of Baltimore City to sponsor more free programs for older adults including training on the use of social media and information technology
 - e. Recognize ageism and initiate a campaign against age discrimination in the workplace

The chart on the next page lists all the issues identified during the course of the public forum and shows the number of votes each one received from those in attendance as they considered the priority level of each issue in comparison to the others.

It probably cannot be stated strongly enough how important the women in the room felt the need is to re-establish the Commission for Women in Baltimore City and how much support they offered for Councilwoman Middleton’s commitment to leadership on this issue. The stated unequivocally that the list of issues they discussed this evening should become the preliminary agenda for the work of new commission when it is established.

Number of Votes	Issue
15	Need for transitional services for girls “aging out” of foster care
15	Lack of education on independent living skills
15	Need for more transparency in the state legislative process
15	Too few women in elected and appointed office
12	Special challenges facing older women
10	Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
9	Need to increase awareness of existing services and opportunities to help
9	Need for mentors for women
8	Substance Abuse, including drugs, alcohol and tobacco, especially need for residential treatment for women with children
8	Food insecurity, including threats to SNAP and FARMS programs
7	Homelessness especially for mothers with children
7	Need for accountability in human services and mental health services
7	Affordable child care
4	Inadequate funding for reproductive health care
3	Need for more focus on proactive safety activities
2	Barriers to accessing financial aid for higher education
2	Human trafficking and prostitution
0	Decaying and aging school facilities
0	Need to teach healthy relationships and safe dating
148	19 Total Issues

September 28, 2017

Baltimore City: Voices of Maryland Women

Photo Album







