

Partners in Life Skills: Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan and Michigan Women's Commission

girl scouts of southeastern michigan

www.gssem.org

MICHIGAN WOMEN'S COMMISSION

www.michigan.gov/mwc

GSSEM and MWC: Inspiring the Next Generation of Leaders

Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan (GSSEM) and the Michigan Women's Commission (MWC) have partnered to provide a unique mentorship opportunity designed to inspire the next generation of women leaders.

The Visible Authentic Leadership committee within the MWC is committed to increasing the number of women serving in publicly visible leadership roles across various sectors. Both the MWC and GSSEM agree that this essential work must begin with engaging our youth in early leadership development. Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place, making it the perfect starting point.

This mentorship program pairs a woman leader in government with a high school-aged Girl Scout. Mentees will develop and enhance their leadership and practical life skills as they create a digital portfolio consisting of various projects showcasing their unique strengths, abilities, gifts, and worldviews. Mentors will guide them along the way, helping them to problem-solve, reflect, navigate challenges, and explore potential leadership paths ahead of them.



2024 Cohort:
12 Mentees
9 Mentors

2025 Cohort:
11 Mentees
8 Mentors

Monthly Themes:
Goal Setting and Self Reflection
College and Career Readiness
Advocacy
Public Policy
Career Exploration: Internships, Job Shadowing, Mock Interviews, and Resume Workshops

About the Mentorship Program

GSSEM gathered responses from both the mentees and mentors who participated in the 2024 and 2025 GSSEM and MWC mentorship program. They were asked during the final month of the program to reflect on key experiences/takeaways from the mentorship experience.



"I think this is a great opportunity to allow young women to connect with professionals."

- 2025 Mentor

100% of mentors said they are somewhat or very likely to continue meeting with their mentee after the conclusion of the mentorship program.





"I loved getting to know each of the mentors and Girls Scouts and getting little pieces of advice."

- 2025 Mentee



"I would definitely recommend this mentorship program to a fellow Girl Scout because now more than ever young ladies need to know that their voices matter and the Girl Scouts mentorship program will help guide to express themselves into learning how to do constructively."

- 2024 Mentee

"All of the mentors were very nice! Even though they weren't my own, they were very welcoming and offered their support."

- 2025 Mentee



"I would enthusiastically recommend the mentorship program to a future Girl Scout. It has been one of the most unique programs I have ever been a part of and will forever hold as a one of my most cherished memories from my time as a Girl Scout. I believe the mentorship program would benefit any girl in high school, regardless of their future career interest."

- 2025 Mentee



"The highlights were being able to meet so many new people."

- 2025 Mentee

Advocacy & Leadership Day

September 2025

MWC and GSSEM held Advocacy & Leadership Day, an in-person badge earning event, focused on advocacy and public speaking skills and how to create change within their community, make strong connections through exclusive networking opportunities, and find inspiration through women leaders in government.

Toria Ward-Gilkey, VP of Partnerships & College and Career Readiness, kicked off the event and introduced **Monica Woodson**, CEO of Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan, for opening remarks and led the Girl Scout pledge and **Cheryl Bergman**, Executive Director of MWC introduced keynote speaker Secretary of State **Jocelyn Benson**.

Breakout rooms were facilitated by:

- **Theresa Rich**, Mayor of Farmington Hills at the Inside the Government Badge Workshop
- **Dr. Geneva Williams**, Founder and CEO of Dr. Geneva Speaks and Michigan Women's Commissioner facilitated the Public Speaker Badge Workshop
- **Janice M. Winfrey**, Detroit City Clerk facilitated the Behind the Ballot and Public Policy Badge Workshop
- **Sumaiya Ahmed Sheikh**, Executive Director, Kalasho Education & Youth Services and Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commissioner facilitated the Behind the Ballot and Public Policy Badge Workshop

Girl Scouts **Lauren Hatto, Jasmine Hunley,** and **Soren O'Dell** shared their experience of being delegates at the UN's 69th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York City.







Girl Scouts Lauren Hatto, Jasmine Hunley, and Soren O'Dell (above), joined Sonja Dunlap at the UN's 69th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York City.

Reflections from Michigan Women Leaders

Monica Woodson, CEO of GSSEM



The mentorship program has been transformative for the girls involved. We've seen tremendous growth in their understanding of the political process and public policy. These young women have developed crucial advocacy skills, learning how to effectively champion causes close to their hearts. Through this partnership, girls are feeling even more empowered and see themselves as future leaders capable of driving meaningful change. This hands-on experience has ignited a passion for civic participation that will serve them—and our state —for years to come. Perhaps most importantly, the girls have discovered their voices. They're more confident in expressing their views and advocating for issues that matter to them and their peers. This program is cultivating a new generation of informed, engaged citizens who are ready to shape Michigan's future.



Sabala Mandava, MWC Commissioner and Chair of the Visible Authentic Leadership Committee

This mentorship program means so much to me because I know how powerful it is when a young girl can see someone who looks like her, talks like her, and has walked a path she can imagine for herself. Through our collaboration with the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan, we're opening doors to public service and leadership in ways that feel real and reachable. I'm grateful to be part of something that helps plant seeds of confidence early—because when we mentor young girls, we're not just guiding their future, we're strengthening the future of our communities.

Let's hear it from women leaders!

Jocelyn Benson, Secretary of State

I had the honor of speaking at the 2024 Democracy & Me and 2025 Advocacy & Leadership Day. I know that most of us think of cookies when we think of the Girl Scouts, but Girl Scouts are involved in so much more. Girl Scouts as young as five are already learning about civic engagement and democracy. I was blown away by these young women, especially during our Q&A. They all had questions about how to overcome challenges. My answer? Learn to look at challenges as an opportunity to get better! As a runner, it could be hard to run up a hill, but I do it because I know at the top of it, I'll be stronger than I was when I started. Embrace your challenges, to keep going, and to know that every challenge is an opportunity to get better and stronger!





Gretchen Whitmer, Governor of Michigan

To build a more representative future, we need to start uplifting and empowering women early. Today, there are only 12 women governors in the United States, we make up less than a third of the House of Representatives, and we have never elected a woman president—yet. With this new program, led by the Michigan Women's Commission, we can teach Girl Scouts the extraordinary power of their voices, encourage them to enter public service, and have representative leadership in the future that looks more like our communities.

Let's hear it from women leaders!

Misti Rice, MWC Commissioner and Chair of the Visible Authentic Leadership Committee, Mentor, VP of Government Affairs for Magna



As a Michigan Women's Commissioner, mentoring young women is a responsibility I hold close to heart. I volunteered as a mentor because I believe in the importance of supporting and guiding the next generation of leaders, especially when I can help them build confidence and navigate their paths. Partnering with the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan (GSSEM) for this mentorship program has been an incredible experience.

Through this program, I have had the privilege to work with truly impressive young women who brought fresh perspectives, a strong sense of purpose, and a remarkable willingness to tackle challenges. One of my biggest takeaways is that mentorship is a two-way journey— every session reinforced how much I could learn from their resilience and ambition. A favorite memory was seeing a mentee overcome a significant hurdle in her goals, showing her inner strength and determination, which reminded me of the power of mentorship to uplift and inspire.



Cheryl Bergman, Executive Director of MWC

I firmly believe that when women lead, families and communities thrive. Research shows that women leaders advance family-friendly policies that strengthen families, communities and economies. Through a partnership between the Michigan Women's Commission and the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan, we are creating mentorship opportunities that introduce Girl Scouts to public service—from running for office to serving on commissions and boards. By highlighting the power of representation and authentic leadership, we're helping young people understand how public policy shapes our lives, no matter the career path. Together, we're cultivating the next generation of women leaders.


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