

# ERIE PRESSIBLE January 2026

## Current Immigration and Refugee Status

The topic of our **January program** is very timely. Our speaker will dive into **local, national, and global refugee immigration status**. The branch meeting will be held at the **Blasco Library** in the **Admiral Room** on **Saturday, January 10th at 10:00 a.m.**

The speaker will be **Nadia (Nadezhda) Pribyshchuk, Director of Immigration Services at MCRC (Multicultural Community Resource Center)**, one of Erie's three refugee resettlement agencies. She will speak to us about the experience of being a refugee and getting established in the US, as well as the situations facing refugees in the US and particularly Erie today.

Nadia was born in Belarus and emigrated from Ukraine in 2012 as a young mother of 3. She worked a wide variety of jobs to provide for her family and eventually joined MCRC as a case manager. She describes her work at MCRC as a "job of my heart." She also serves refugees from Ukraine as a volunteer through her church. Nadia has real-world experience as a refugee and can also speak about the experiences of the clients that she serves in MCRC's Immigration Department. Let's extend a big thank you to Kristin Headley for organizing this important event and coordinating the speaker.

Some of our Erie branch AAUW Volunteers at the Harding School Winterfest (below)



## President's Message

Friends,

As we say farewell to 2025, let us celebrate the light of community, the courage of advocacy, and the promise of new beginnings. December arrives with its aura of festivities, and the crisp cool weather adds a touch of magic to this time of year. For those of us who grew up in warmer climates, the sight of snow never loses its wonder, even if walking and driving remains a challenge. Yet beyond the beautiful white landscape, what I truly love about the season is the spirit of togetherness it inspires.

As many of you know, I am a Bangladeshi immigrant who has cherished the opportunities this country has offered my family. Growing up in Bangladesh, we admired the excellence of U.S. education, believing it to be the very best in the world. My husband pursued his PhD here, following his brother who earned both his bachelor's and doctoral degree in the US. Their journey echoed by their father, who was trained here, and of uncles and aunts who were Fulbright scholars. For decades, the United States was the destination of choice for immigrants to fulfill their academic dreams.



Sharmin Khundker

But today, the landscape has shifted. New international student enrollment in U.S. universities fell by 17% in the Fall 2025 compared to previous years, largely due to visa delays, denials and restrictive policies. Families like my own, who once dreamt of studying here now look to Canada, Australia, and Europe, where policies are more welcoming. This decline not only impacts international students but also affects U.S. campuses, communities, and the economy, with estimates suggesting up to \$1 billion in lost revenue. At the same time, U.S. students are facing significant educational changes of their own. Rising tuition costs, shifting federal policies, and debates over curriculum and access have created uncertainty for many young Americans. The challenges of affordability and equity mean that both domestic and international students are navigating a system in transition.

AAUW reminds us that advocacy in education must serve everyone—ensuring equity, access, and opportunity for women, underrepresented groups, and the students from all backgrounds. Our mission highlights that the strength of U.S. education lies in its inclusivity and its ability to empower diverse voices.

As we step into the new year, let us commit to keeping education in the United States a beacon for both domestic and international students—welcoming talent, nurturing innovation, and upholding the promise of new beginnings for all.

I want to wish you peace, joy, and togetherness this holiday season. May the new year bring fresh opportunities, brighter days, and moments of happiness for all.

Sharmin

## Public Policy Update — Education

On November 12, the Pennsylvania State Legislature passed and the governor signed a 50.1 billion dollar budget that makes significant investments in public schools. The deal ended a four month impasse that had stopped the flow of billions of dollars to schools, counties and non-profits that provide critical services. The budget includes a \$178 million reduction in public school reimbursement to cyber charter schools and more than \$500 million in new funding for the poorest schools to help close an “adequacy gap”. These dollars will mostly flow to low income communities with students who need extra help or where residents face high property taxes. The budget also includes \$125 million for school facilities and \$100 million for school mental health and safety programs. Districts will save \$178 million through a change to how cyber schools are reimbursed. The budget does not create taxpayer funded school vouchers, but does expand a popular credit program that underwrites scholarships for students to attend private schools.

According to Governor Shapiro, “The 2025-26 budget delivers for families, schools and communities by providing an overall increase in public school funding totaling more than \$900 million, including increases in public school adequacy, Basic Education funding and an increase in Special Education funding. The budget also includes investments in school infrastructure and continues important programs including free breakfast and mental health services” .Governor Shapiro also congratulated Pennsylvania lawmakers and admitted that reaching an agreement on the budget was challenging. He stated “ Pennsylvania is one of only a handful of states with a divided legislature and it takes a majority of votes in the Republican led Senate and a majority of votes in the Democratic led House to reach consensus. It requires all members to compromise.”

## January Public Policy — Zoom Meeting

Major steps toward dismantling the US Department of Education are underway.

Following deep staff cuts in the Department, six new “Partnerships” have been created to take over the work of core K-12 and higher education programs. These new entities include partnerships with Departments of Labor, Health, Public Lands and Foreign Policy. Grave concerns regarding the Education Department’s ability to carry out core functions have been raised by AAUW and many other organizations.

AAUW Erie Branch Inc. is scheduling a ZOOM meeting on **January 12th at 7:00 PM** to discuss this and other potential concerns regarding the effects of changes that impact our core mission.

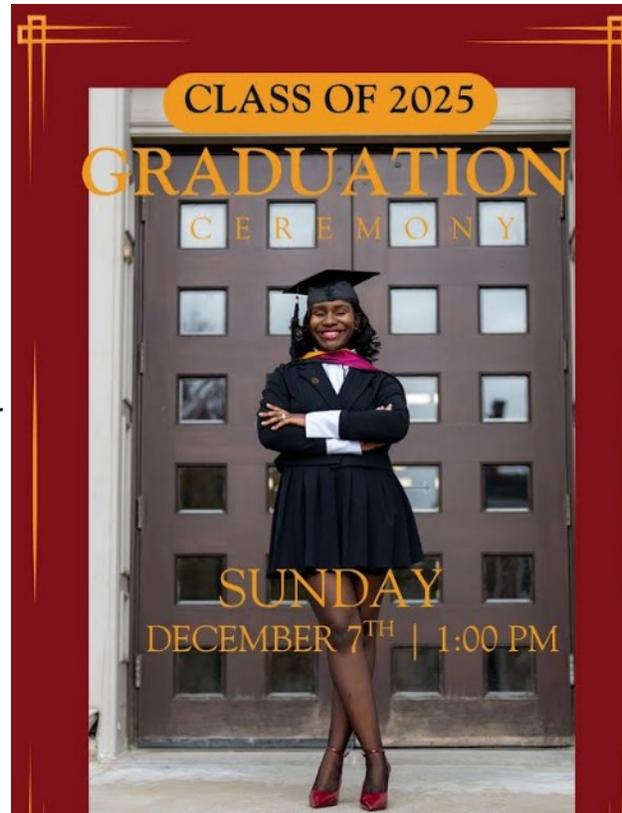
All members will receive a ZOOM invitation. Please plan to attend so that we can discuss how such changes may stifle our ability to serve women and girls in the future, and how we may be able to respond. If you have questions regarding these issues, please feel free to send them to [lseigley@yahoo.com](mailto:lseigley@yahoo.com). so that we can include them in our discussion.

## Scholarship Scoop!

We are so excited to report that our 2025 Next Chapter Scholarship recipient, DeAzhane M. Matthews, has completed her studies at Gannon University.

She completed her B.A. in Criminal Justice at the completion of the Fall term of 2025.

DeAzhane is grateful for the scholarship because without it, she would not have been able to take courses over the summer to assist with completing her degree in 2025. She has accepted a position as a juvenile probation officer in Erie County and plans to pursue a master's degree.



## Holiday Luncheon

We all enjoyed each other's company at the holiday luncheon at Kahkwa Country Club in December and enjoyed the music provided by Liz Sesler-Beckman and Kelly Armor.



## AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund

Thank you to the generous members who contributed a total of \$387 at the Holiday Luncheon. The AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund supports court cases which address sex discrimination in employment or education.

## New Member Bios

The last couple of months we introduced you to new members. We have some biographical information to share about them. We are so fortunate to have such interesting and diverse members.

### Darla-Elayne (Dee) Bretta Brown

Dee served in the Illinois Air National Guard. She then went back to college and received her B.A. degree in urban studies. She did further study at Bethany Theological Seminary and obtained a graduate certificate in theology. Dee has been active in church work and loves to travel. She has been to all 50 states and over a dozen countries. When at home, Dee is busy with her two delightful toy poodles.

### Sepideh (Sepi) Javadpour

Sepi is a first generation Iranian-American, born in the U.S. but raised between both countries. Her B.S. degree is in Computer Science and Engineering, and she has worked in the tech industry for 12 years. She came to Erie 4 years ago. She is interested in returning to a life-style closer to her family's lineage as farmers and would like to have a small farm in addition to her tech career. Sepi enjoys cooking, eating, horse-back riding, traveling, learning new languages, and nature walks.

### Sarah Peelman

Sarah received her degree in biology from Mercyhurst University. She has put that degree to good use working as the sustainability coordinator and arborist for the city of Erie. She strongly values the positive benefits of nature and spending time outdoors. She understands the importance of educating people about the benefits of green spaces in their lives and teaches them how to take care of their trees, gardens, and parks. She says "the living world is a beautiful place and humans are just one being in it." When not helping to care for the green spaces in our town, she loves books, knitting, and gardening.

## Scholarship Committee 2026

Joining the AAUW Scholarship Committee is a high-impact, low-commitment opportunity to directly advance equity and education for Erie County women in a meaningful way. By committing to a maximum of three brief meetings per year (usually online), you play a vital role in shaping the future of the organization's mission. Committee members are essential for selecting the recipients, as the individual awards are determined solely by the qualifications of the candidates who apply and are evaluated using the committee's carefully developed rubric.

This year, your involvement is even more impactful as the committee works to establish a networking list to follow up with previous recipients, ensuring the support extends beyond the initial award to foster a lasting professional community that assists them in achieving their career and personal goals. In addition, as a committee member, you can use your communication skills to promote the scholarship, ensuring the annual funds determined by the Board reach and empower the broadest possible pool of ambitious women.

This year will also be a year of transition, as we are seeking a new Scholarship Committee Chair. If you have any ideas to promote the scholarship throughout Erie County, or if you are interested in Chairing or working with the committee, please reach out to Matasha MurrellJones (murrelljones@gmail.com).

## Branch Study/Interest Groups

**Food and Friends** Once again the Food and Friends initiative for January will focus on outreach to underserved individuals in the Erie community.

Every Sunday of the year, First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant offers a meal to individuals and families in our community who are in need. This initiative typically serves up to 200 individuals each week. Erie organizations and groups are invited to prepare and serve the meal.

Food and Friends plans to purchase food, prepare and serve the meal on **January 18**. Volunteers are needed to help to prepare and serve dinner. If you would like to volunteer please call or email Loretta Seigley (814-520-8784) or lseigley@yahoo.com Thanks in advance for your willingness to help!

**Games, Games, Games!** Susan Roehrl is hosting the next Games meeting at her house, 626 Mohawk Drive on **Tuesday January 13 from 2-4 PM**. If you plan to come, please call Susan at 814-868-4537 to make your reservation.

**AAUW Book Club** meets the first Thursday of every month, **from 1-2:30 PM at Springhill**, 2323 Edinboro Road, room 316. In January Book Club will meet **January 8**. Cindy Belczyk is the coordinator for the group (814-873-5401 or BelczykCA@gmail.com).

Upcoming book selections include:

**Jan. 8, *The Lost Bookshop*** by Evie Woods

**Feb. 5, *The Love of my Life*** by Rosie Walsh

**March 5, *James*** by Percival Everett

**April 2, *The Book Club for Troublesome Women*** by Marie Bostwick

**May 7, *Miss Morgan's Book Brigade*** by Janet Skeslien

**Computer Knowledge** has held several classes so far. Future classes will be based on decisions made at the next class. Contact Loretto Bellicini at loretto.bellicini1@gmail.com for more information.

**Gourmet** Join us at **Roma's Italian Kitchen** located at 2933 W. 12th St. for our gourmet group on January 9 at 6 p.m. Please R.S.V.P. to Diane Wisniewski (814-602-9344 or Nanaddwiz@gmail.com) on or before January 3.

**Politalk** is an unstructured discussion about domestic and international political events which leads to brainstorming about ways of coping with such events. Politalk **meets the 3rd Thursday of the month from 1-3 PM** at chair Asuman Baskan's house 3838 State Street. (814-282-8277) (irrepressibleturk@gmail.com)

**Global Friends** is an outreach program to immigrant women in our community. It is open to both AAUW members and immigrant women. The intent is to understand and respect other cultures. Global Friends is chaired by Edie Cultu (814-397-2975, edie\_cultu@yahoo.com) and meets at her home at **638 Vermont Ave.**

The **January 26th** meeting will be at 7 p.m. on the topic: **USCRI's work with the Erie School District given by Tisha Tyden.**

**Global Friends Holiday Party**



# January 2026

**Sun      Mon      Tue      Wed      Thu      Fri      Sat**

				1 New Year's Day	2	3
4	5	6	7	8 Book Club 1-2:30 pm Springhill	9 Gourmet 6 pm Roma's Italian Kitchen	10 Branch Mtg Refugee Talk 10:00 am Blasco Library
11	12 Education Policy Discussion 7 pm Zoom	13 Games 2-4 pm 626 Mohawk	14	15 Politalk 1-3 pm Asuman's	16	17
18 Food & Friends Sunday Supper	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 Global Friends 6 pm Edie's home	27	28	29	30	31



Erie Branch ♦ Founded in 1902

P.O. Box 9264 Erie PA 16505

### AAUW's Mission

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through education, philanthropy, and research. By joining AAUW you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance. In principle and in practice AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in the organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class.

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Chris Spoto  
image master

2827 West 26th St.  
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