

**Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, September 14, 2016

Ethan Allen Room, Vermont State House, Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Carol Buchdahl, Ruth Finn, Melinda Moulton

Commissioners absent:

Lynn Batchelor, Eileen Boland, Charlotte Dennett, Laine Dunham, Cathy Frey, Jennie Gartner, Susie Hudson, Nancy LaVarnway, Danielle Martel, Colin Ryan, Kerry Secrest

Advisors present:

Becky Raymond of Building Bright Futures, by phone
Diane Derby of U.S. Senator Leahy's Office
Auburn Watersong of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Kaitlyn Armstrong of Vermont Women In Law Enforcement, by phone
Rachel Jolly of Vermont Works for Women

Guests: Robyn Freedner-Maguire, Let's Grow Kids

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Myers, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Myers

Meeting called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Welcome/Introductions: Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

Staff/event updates:

Cary passed out a Staff Update. She called attention to the list of events beginning on Page 2, and the many opportunities for Commissioners and Advisors to get involved. This document will also be e-mailed to Commissioners and Advisors.

The Change the Story report on Women Owned Business will be released at the Women Business Owner's Network (WBON) event on October 19th.

Vermont Works for Women's annual Women Can Do! conference will be held October 13th, at Vermont Tech. Our next meeting will be held that day on campus so Commissioners can participate.

Our Gubernatorial Forum is next week and we are also partnering with Let's Grow Kids on their upcoming Gubernatorial Forum at the UVM Davis Center in Burlington. Robyn mentioned that

Sue Minter and Phil Scott will attend, and they are partnering with the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children's (VAEYC) annual conference which is being held that day. A link for question submittal will be sent soon.

Women's Fund Event, October 25th at Northern Stage in White River Junction will be similar to the recent May fundraising event, and will feature Madeleine Kunin as keynote.

New England Women's Policy Conference, November 18th in Boston. Commissioners can attend and spread the word. Let's Grow Kids will be part of a panel with someone from Mass, & Maine or RI. The event ends with a reception honoring women who ran for office, and Cary hopes Sue Minter might attend.

Male Champions for Change Event, Nov 30th in Burlington. Melinda explained that the idea stemmed from a conversation about how to engage men in our work. They have a list of 150 male business leaders in Chittenden County, and the goal of the event is for attendees to learn about Change the Story, issues and events, the equal pay compact, and to facilitate a conversation about these issues. Mark Redmond, Joseph Fusco, Cary, Colin, and Tiff will be speaking. Melinda is working on the invite now. Skinny Pancake will offer a Cash Bar. She is looking for support and awareness that it's happening. If people know male business leaders in the area to invite, let her know.

Lilly highlighted events in 2017 to mark on calendars. Legislative Lunch will be at noon on January 11th. The Women's History Month Event will be at Goddard College on the evening of March 15th, and Equal Pay Day is on Tuesday, April 11th in the Card Room at the State House.

Melinda shared her fundraising plan to host an Equal Means Equal video screening on November 3rd **[this has been subsequently changed to November 10th]** and to charge \$5 per person, which could raise \$1250 for the Legislative Lunch. Main Street Landing can collect the money and donate to the foundation. She is also thinking about a Moth storytelling event at the Main Street Landing Black Box about what it's like to be a woman in Vermont. This could raise additional funds for the foundation.

Kaitlyn suggested that we could find other places to have a film screening, for instance at Middlebury College, she will reach out to them to find out.

Cary explained that the Vermont Commission on Women Education and Research Foundation is a 501(c)(3) that pays for the legislative lunch. Donations should be made to that organization. The Commission on Women does not spend any state funds on the luncheon. Staff cannot do the fundraising for the Foundation.

Melinda mentioned the [Clio Visualizing History](#) website created by Lola Van Wagenen, which Lynn Blackwell also worked on.

Generative Thinking Introduction and Discussion:

Generative Thinking is something Melinda learned on another board and wanted to share with the Commission. The idea is to assess external trends, to invite questions & hypotheses, and address ambiguities and challenges. The group can spend time listening to staff about a problem or obstacle to help move things forward, and offer expertise and support. It creates a safe space for the staff to bring challenges and for the Commission to offer ideas without creating directives. It is typically facilitated by the Chair & Executive Director.

To give Generative Thinking a try, Cary opened up the topic of “Women in Corrections”. Cary asked Commissioners to step back and think in a broad sense about what the Commission’s role could be, and where should we be focused? There are a lot of groups working on Women in Corrections, and we’re a part of some of those groups. Suzi Wizowaty got a grant to look at how to reduce the number of incarcerated women, Cary and Rachel are both part of the group working on that. Hannah is working on research to understand all of the services being offered to inmates at each facility. Highlights of this discussion included:

- Lund offers Kids Apart, which does work with Women in prison. They have a family friendly room.
- There are 134 women at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) now. About 80% of female inmates have children.
- We should get some input from women who have been released.
- There is a new interim superintendent at CRCF, Jennifer Sprafke, although she has been there for a long time. She started as an officer, served as Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) director, and as Assistant Superintendent before.
- The length of sentencing is typically 10-20 days in jail. This is frustrating for law enforcement when they speak with habitual offenders who laugh at the correctional facilities and the lack of strict enforcement. At some point, prison needs to be punishment for their crimes.
- The majority of women offenders are not violent. We need to focus more on rehabilitation, and prevention. There are significant housing concerns for inmates before release.
- Kaitlyn offered to put together a presentation from the law enforcement perspective.
- The Victim Assistance Program which is led by Anera Foco, is offering programming to incarcerated women. 80% of women incarcerated are victims of domestic violence
- It was suggested that most women going in to prison have already lost custody of their children.
- Melinda wondered if it would be helpful to have an ad hoc committee, and Cary agreed that would be very helpful. Kaitlyn, Marcia, and Rachel would be willing to be on that committee.
- Rachel added that the Dec. 1 VLS Reimagining Justice Conf. is likely to be very interesting, provocative, and unbiased.

Input and action requested from Commission:

Gubernatorial Candidate Forum: Lilly discussed the upcoming Gubernatorial Forum, which will be held next Thursday from 12-1:30 p.m., in the House Chamber. This event is co-sponsored by the Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW) & the League of Women Voters of Vermont. Cary will welcome everyone, and Anne Galloway of the VT Digger is moderating. She will ask 7-10 pre-prepared questions which have been selected out of pages of questions submitted to us by experts and the public. Audience members can submit questions on notecards, which will be collected, screened for relevance and to prevent duplication, and several will be asked by Anne. We need volunteers, including runners to collect index cards (Melinda volunteered), greeters in the Flag Room handing out notecards & pens, a Twitter feed watcher, and a photographer. VWW might have someone who could take photographs. Lilly asked people willing to help to let her know, and to arrive by 11:15 a.m. if possible.

Women Can Do!: Rachel told the Commission about Vermont Works for Women's (VWW) upcoming Women Can Do! Conference on October 13th, promoting stem & trades careers for high school girls. It will offer several dozen workshops led by women from all over the state. The Commission's meeting will be that day at Vermont Tech next month. VWW would love commissioners and advisors to come observe and participate and give feedback on the workshops. There is also an Action Expo from 12:30 – 2:00 p.m. that happens "farmers market style", where girls go around to stations and have 5-8 minute interactions. They need more stations, as well as volunteers to help girls keep moving along. Rachel passed around a signup sheet. Commissioners who aren't here and want to volunteer can contact Katie Craig at kcraig@vtworksforwomen.org.

Social Media Action Plan: The Commission worked with Marketing Partners this summer to bolster our website, update the VIEW, and to improve our social media presence. We are now active on Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and YouTube. LinkedIn is a great platform for Commissioners to engage, follow, like, and share posts, and staff would love for Commissioners to engage with our social media pages on whatever platform they prefer. Staff will put together something in writing for Commissioners about how to best engage with the Commission on social media.

Paid Family & Medical Leave: We will discuss this next month.

Announcements

Auburn Watersong announced:

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence's 30th Anniversary event is next Friday, the 23rd, from 4:30-8, honoring Gov. Kunin, maybe Sen. Sanders, and features an incredible survivor as keynote, as well as Muslim Girls Making Change, and a great seated dinner. 150 people are registered now. There are still a few tickets available. [Find the event registration information here.](#)

Melinda announced several upcoming events:

Indivisible: Love Knows No Borders film screening next Thursday the 22nd at 6:00 p.m. at the Film House. Free, open to the public.

The first Presidential Debate on 9/26 will be live streamed at Main Street Landing, they are raising funds for the Clinton Campaign, and will charge \$20 per person.

Through Women United Vermont, Melinda is co-chairing a Leading with the Heart event collecting necessary goods, flowers, and chocolates for widowed women in poverty which will be delivered on Valentine's Day. She is hoping for support in finding donations.

Meeting adjourned at 11:58 p.m.