

Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, October 10th, 2019 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
32 College Street, Montpelier VT

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell (by phone), Lisa Carlson, Mary Daly, Erica Hare, Emilie Kornheiser, Kim Nolan, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Kerry Secrest (by phone), Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Charlotte Dennett, Marcia Merrill, Lisa Ryan

Advisors present:

Karen Tronsguard-Scott of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Alison Lamagna of Vermont Works for Women
Amy Brady of Voices for Vermont's Children

Guests: Edisa Muller, Aly Johnson-Kurts of Change The Story VT

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions | Approval of September 2019 Meeting Minutes

Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Approval of September 2019 meeting minutes:

MOTION made by Kim and seconded by Marybeth

To approve the minutes from September 11, 2019

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes approved.

2. Racial Equity with Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity, State of Vermont

Xusana provided an overview of the Executive Director of Racial Equity role, set to sunset in five years. There is no time limit on reaching equity. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

The intersection of race and gender is incredibly important as we look to our future – and how can we sustain this beautiful state that we love so much without supporting the marginalized communities that exist here?

Highlighted the intersection of race and gender. Looked at Equal Pay days by race, and drivers experiencing vehicle stops by race, noting that these statistics don't account for the chilling effect that happens in communities of color; the trips not taken out of concern of being stopped, harassed, or shot by police.

Questions we should be asking:

Are we naming inequity?

Are we pursuing quality or quantity?

Are we stacking diverse staff in the same positions and departments, or are we including them on every team and at every level (when possible)?

Whom do we serve? Whom do we attract?

Do our policies target/serve internal staff only, or prospective staff as well? The public?

What don't we know yet?

Are we well-versed in the language and the issues? Are we staying current with equity-related news? What are our go-to sources? How are we supporting staff?

Using the Executive Director of Racial Equity as a resource:

Tone Check: Revise internal and external materials for equity promoting tone and substance

Data Dive: Analyze key indicators and discuss their meanings

Everything Else: General questions, insights, bright ideas

Commissioner comment: hoping that among the many things you're working on, you'll be able to help identify areas where we need to collect data.

Commissioner comment: recommending the book "Stranger in the Kingdom"

Xusana offered to return and do a deeper dive another time.

3. Staff Updates

Change The Story partners have gotten together with the Vermont Network to form a learning community to work on dismantling white supremacy in our work.

Kim Nolan is our new Change The Story representative.

We are closing in on finishing our Sexual Harassment education campaign website.

We interviewed last week for our new Data Management Coordinator person, for a temporary, part-time, 12-hour-per-week person. They will tackle the listening project data, will be working with other state agencies, hopefully help us update Change The Story reports, and build some systems to retain this information in the future.

Commissioner comment: ADS is hiring a new Chief Data Coordinator, and this person should sit down and connect.

The VCW budget submission is due today.

VSCA Event: Moments of Reckoning in the Campaign for Women's Rights with Prof. Amy Morseman on November 3rd at 4:30 p.m., Main Street Landing, Burlington.

Amy Brady announced Voice's for Vermont's Children Conference November 6th and 7th, invited VCW to attend. She also brought a number of copies of the 2019 Kids Count Data Count Book, please take a copy if you're interested.

It's our Advisory Council focused meeting next month. Cary and Lisa wonder, how can we support the work of advisors?

- Focus the time on their priorities, and less time on their organization. A one-pager on who their organization is would meet the informational need.
- Focus on what we can do back in our own communities or as a body.
- World café style possibility, depending on time
- Grouping things by committee, potentially

4. Incarcerated Women

Last night, Cary and Marybeth were at an event at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library on Incarcerated Women. Cary moderated and Marybeth was one of three panelists. This session, the Women's Caucus has decided to focus almost entirely on incarcerated women, and Marybeth gave us an update.

80% of the total Department of Corrections population is out in the community. The number of incarcerated people is going down overall, but the number of women isn't. The incarceration rate for women of color is nearly 10 times that the rate of incarceration of white women.

Women's pathways to incarceration are very different than men's. Women are often victims of domestic and sexual violence, we have rising rates of human trafficking. Many incarcerated women have experienced severe trauma. Many of their crimes are crimes of survival.

The Women's Caucus held a listening forum at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF), and had a tour at the Southern State Correctional Facility last month.

The Women's Caucus has a strategy setting meeting in October.

In 2007, Vermont engaged in Justice Reinvestment I. Justice Reinvestment II is happening from August – December 2019. It is focused on addressing increasing recidivism, the increasing pretrial population, prison facilities above capacity, the community supervision piece, CRCF & North West State Correctional Facilities (NWSCF) facilities in decline, and policymakers needing more nuanced data.

ACLU just released the VT Blueprint for Smart Justice.

How do we reduce people going into the system? It's very difficult to traverse and get people out of.

Got real, fresh milk at CRCF, as of today.

What can we be doing as a Commission to move this forward? Discussion points included:

- 250 men in Mississippi.
- bureaucracy at the DOC.
- Racial bias seems to be prevalent in the DOC. Intimate partner bias isn't dealt with in diversion, and so women are kicked out of diversion.
- There is a trauma to prison pipeline. The average age at CRCF is 22. DOC does not know how many women are serving their time and how many women are there for a violation, such as their probation officer doesn't approve of their housing. There is incredible paternalism in the system. Many have aged out of DCF custody into homelessness. The more beds we build, the more will be filled. We need space for real programming and mental health services beyond medication.
- Trauma-informed responses.
- Discussion about the pros and cons of the proposal of the large campus built by a private entity.
- The emergency mental health services available in the facility are inadequate.
- Many incarcerated women have children in state custody, and the problem of the pipeline is only growing and expanding unless we can address the child custody system.
- Justice Reinvestment report is due January 1st, the Commission should be looking at that in January.

5. Committee Work

Lisa has Committee assignments for everyone. We don't have time for deep committee work today.

Cary passed around a handout with our four committees, the statement that supports the Committee's work, and the priorities we identified last month that falls under each Committee. Cary will share this electronically as well.

Cary talked about Pathways to Poverty, which worked in four Committees, and she will share the report by email as food for thought about how our Committees could function.

6. Announcements

Change The Story Commentary series updates: the last one came from Missy Krauss from the Vermont Women's Fund. Ed Adrian is writing about Paid Family Leave for November.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:25 p.m.