

Commission Meeting Minutes March 11, 2009

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill, Chair; Laine Akiyama, Sharon Baade, Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Cary Brown, Mary Claire Carroll, Ruth Finn, Linda Fogg, Cathy Frey, and Anne McClaughry.

Commissioners Absent: Carol Buchdahl, Retta Dunlap, Karen Henry, Marion Milne, and Vicky Young.

Advisory Council Members Present: Mary Alice Bisbee representing the Older Women's League, Maggie Gendron from Senator Leahy's Office, Lindy Hatcher representing Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women, Linda Ingold representing the Vermont Women's Business Center, and Carol Story representing Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains,

Guests: Dounia Bredes, and Carmel Quinn along with a panel of girl scouts from the Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains.

Staff and Intern: Janet Bullard, Wendy Love, and Renee Kelly.

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Janet Bullard

The meeting was called to order at 9:38 a.m.

Welcome from the Chair/Announcements/Minutes/Check In

Marcia welcomed everyone and then asked folk to introduce themselves. Motion made by Eileen Boland to accept the minutes of the February 11, 2009 Commission Meeting as written. Seconded by Cathy Frey and passed unanimously. Marcia announced that she would not be at the May Commission Meeting because she would be recuperating from knee surgery. Lastly, Marcia announced that she would be testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday, March 16 regarding the Commission's position on Freedom to Marry.

Girl Scouts Presentation

Marcia introduced Carmel Quinn, Director of Advocacy for the Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains. Carmel thanked the Commission for inviting the Girl Scouts to come and give a presentation about the UN Conference on the Status of Women as well as the results of the recent Girl Scout survey, and the Girls Rock the Capital Internship Program.

Carmel stated that this is the fourth online survey that the girl scouts have undertaken, partnering with the Commission. This year's survey focused on financial literacy and money issues for girls. The survey was available online for 6th –12th grade students. Girls from 42 Vermont schools shared their thoughts about finances and their hopes and dreams as they relate to money. Carmel shared some survey findings and then a panel of Girl Scouts talked about the survey findings and discussed their experiences with saving and spending money. All of the girls who responded to the survey had savings accounts, although some were better at saving than others. Carmel noted that copies of the survey summary would be available next week.

Next, Carmel led the girls in a discussion about the United Nations 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women held earlier this month in New York City and noted that the theme of this year's session was caregiving responsibilities in the context of HIV/Aids. The girls then led us in an educational

exercise illustrating how fast HIV/AIDS can be spread. This exercise was also done at the UN Session. The girls shared highlights from their trip and concluded by reading us the statement that was developed.

“Girls’ Statement – 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, March 2009

We the girl delegates of the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women hereby recognize the human rights of girls and stand to address the needs of girls with respect to equal sharing of responsibilities, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

As girls we are often responsible for doing the majority of housework and care giving. These responsibilities often force us to interrupt or abandon our education.

States must provide access to free quality and compulsory education for all youth from primary through secondary school. We believe that quality education includes: comprehensive sex education; care-related training for girls and boys; vocational training; women’s history; girls’ rights; and business training.

Governments must help subsidize the cost of labor when families send their daughters to school.

Increasing numbers of girls are forced to become caregivers because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In addition, girls are increasingly infected with the HIV/AIDS virus due to our social, cultural, economic, and biological vulnerabilities.

Governments must invest in social services and infrastructure, which provide and support quality care for those living with HIV/AIDS in order to reduce the burden on girl caregivers.

Governments and community organizations need to recognize that men and boys must be educated in order to assume responsibility for their own sexual health, get tested for HIV/AIDS, and disclose their status to all partners.

We recognize that social norms and cultural traditions play a significant role in the marginalized status of girls worldwide. In addition, we believe that these practices often operate in ways that serve to control girls’ behaviors and hinder their physical and social mobility.

Girls recognize the need to construct safe confidential spaces where we can talk openly about our ideas and experiences and mentor one another.

We believe that governments and communities need to recognize the need to reevaluate social norms and cultural practices paying specific attention to the negative impact these practices have on girls and transforming these practices to promote gender equality.

Policymakers and people in positions of power need to recognize that girls are especially vulnerable in a variety of areas including but not limited to labor and sexual exploitation.

Community leaders must be educated about issues that specifically affect us, such as gender equality, HIV/AIDS, girls’ rights, gender norms and stereotypes, and human rights. These leaders must take an active role in educating communities about gender equality.

Girls must have access to speak with policymakers, in particular female lawmakers, and to lobby about the issues that impact our lives.

Girls' rights must be recognized and the laws designed to protect our rights must be enforced. Particular attention must be paid to the many forms of gender-based violence that we face in our homes, communities, schools and workplaces.

Lack of social and economic power as well as education prevents girls from accessing health services.

We recognize the need for universal access to quality health care. For girls this includes having access to annual gynecological services, medical professionals who are trained to work with girls, sterile medical facilities, multiple forms of contraception, as well as STI and STD prevention, and feminine hygiene products.

We demand access to equal pay for equal work and recognition for the unpaid labor we provide.

Research and data collection has failed to focus on girls as primary subjects. As a result our sexual experiences are not taken into account when disease prevention policies are designed.

International organizations, governments, NGOs, and the private sector must invest in research on HIV/AIDS focusing specifically on girls and young women.

We represent the women of tomorrow, but today we are girls. As girls, we have legitimate concerns that need to be heard. Our specific needs and experiences are distinct from women's, and therefore must be recognized in order to achieve gender equality."

Carmel finished the presentation by informing everyone about the "Girls Rock the Capitol", the Girl Scouts Legislative Internship program. Carmel explained that the internship program incorporates training and experiential learning for girls who work side by side with women in leadership roles in Vermont government. The program is designed to immerse teens in the democratic process, promote leadership and team building skills, and to provide a forum to discuss ideas and issues that are important to Vermonters. By the end of this year's program, the interns will have participated in twenty-one hours of public speaking, advocacy, civics, self-defense, media literacy, critical thinking and leadership training through the project. Currently there are twelve participants in the program. Applications for next year's program are due to Carmel Quinn at cquinn@girlscoutsgwm.org by early August. The program runs from January – May. You can also reach Carmel at 878-7131 extension 105.

New Business

Wendy called everyone's attention to the Election of Chair process that is outlined in the Commission's Orientation Manual. She noted that the process calls for anyone who is interested in submitting her name for nomination for chair to let Wendy know by the May Commission Meeting (in this case May 13, 2009). The chair serves for a two-year term. An election for chair will be held at the June Commission meeting. Wendy informed everyone that Marcia is interested in being renominated as chair.

Paid Sick Days Legislation

Motion made by Mary Claire Carroll, chair of the Economic Security Committee, that the Vermont Commission on Women support H.382 legislation calling for paid sick time. Seconded by Laine Akiyama.

Mary Claire explained that the Commission has been working, as part of a coalition along with Voices for Vermont's Children, the Livable Wage Coalition and others, on legislation calling for a minimum number paid sick days for all Vermont employees. This bill proposes to ensure that all workers in Vermont be

able to take care of their own health and safety needs and those of their families by allowing employees to accrue a minimum number of paid hours annually so that workers can take paid time from work to address issues related to health care or safety for themselves or a family member.

Wendy reviewed the highlights from the Paid Sick Days study conducted by UVM medical students. The study found that parents who did not have an "at home" parent and had less than 3 paid sick days were less likely to take their children for well child visits.

Wendy gave an overview of H.382. The bill applies to any company that has at least one employee. Each employee shall accrue one hour of paid health care time for every 30 hours worked up to a maximum of 56 hours per year. Accrued but unused hours shall be carried over to the next year, but an employee may use no more than 56 hours in any one year, unless the employer provides a more generous allotment. Accrued but unused hours shall not be reimbursed to the employee at the time of separation of employment. Also there is a provision in the bill that these hours can be used to obtain social or legal services for an employee or relative who is a victim of domestic or sexual violence.

Motion made by Anne McClaughry to table this motion. Seconded by Ruth Finn. Motion to table passed unanimously.

Anne suggested that both pro and con speakers on this issue be invited to the April 1st Commission meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.