

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill, Chair; Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Ann Cardinal, Ruth Finn, Anne McLaughry, and Cary Brown.

Commissioners Absent: Sharon Baade, Marion Milne, Cathy Frey, Karen Henry, Vicky Young, Linda Fogg, Laine Akiyama, Retta Dunlop, Carol Buchdahl

Advisory Council Members Present: Maggie Gendron from Senator Leahy's Office, Tiffany Bleumle and Leigh Steele from Vermont Works for Women, Jean Hopkins from the League of Women Voters, and Carol Story representing the Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains.

Staff: Janet Bullard, Wendy Love, and Lilly Talbert.

Attendees: approx 80 members of the public, UVM students, formerly incarcerated women and their families, agencies serving incarcerated women, state agency staff

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Marcia Merrill, Chair of the Vermont Commission on Women introduced herself, commissioners, advisors and staff members present and welcomed everyone to the listening forum on Women in the Vermont Correctional system. She said that the listening forum is part of the traveling public art installation entitled, "Interrupted Life: Incarcerated Mothers in the United States." She noted that audience members included representatives from the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Agency of Human Services, members of the legislature, and organizations that provide services to women both within the facility and upon release into the community.

Marcia stated that the Commission has a long history of working on prison issues, starting with a listening forum in 1998, and followed by a conference in 2002 that called for the creation of a women's prison. The Commission felt it was time for another community discussion since incarcerated women have been at the Northwest State Correctional Facility for almost a year, and there have been major changes as a result of this move.

Sixteen different individuals--formerly incarcerated women, their family members, and representatives from organizations that served them--spoke about their experiences with the correctional system-- what was working, what isn't working, and what changes they would like to see in order for the women to be productive members of their communities.

Topics addressed included:

- Prenatal care, including dietary needs of pregnant women
- Adequate clothing for inmates
- Life skill/financial/job training for inmates—especially for those with short sentences
- Housing issues post incarceration including cost of incarceration for women who lack community housing.

- Alternatives to incarceration
- Violations policy
- Issues relating to children of incarcerated women ranging from visitation to stigma attached to being a child of an incarcerated parent to the need for a children's bill of rights and arrest protocols that do not account for children's welfare.
- Reentry issues—community supports, rent deposits, bedding, furniture
- Mental health issues-PDST

A short discussion and question and answer period followed.

Marcia Merrill thanked everyone who spoke and thanked the audience for coming. She stated that the Commission will share the findings from this forum with the legislature, policy makers, and various state and community organizations.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.