

**Commission Minutes**  
**November 14, 2007**

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill, Chair; Sharon Baade; Eileen Boland; Gretchen Bailey; Carol Buchdahl; Mary Claire Carroll; Ruth Finn; Linda Fogg; Retta Dunlap; Karen Henry; and Vicky Young;

Commissioners Absent: Cary Brown, Cathy Frey, Anne McClaughry, and Marion Milne.

Advisory Council Members Present: Ed Booth representing American Civil Liberties Union, Joanna Cole representing Vermont League of Women Voters, Barbara Hannon representing Older Women's League, Lindy Hatcher representing Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women, Linda Ingold representing Vermont Women's Business Center, Carol Story representing Girl Scout Council of Vermont, and Amy Torchia representing Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Staff and Intern: Janet Bullard, Shelby Gillespie, Judith Irving, Wendy Love, and Lilly Talbert.

Guests: Richard Cate, Commissioner of Education; Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director, ALANA; Robert Appel, Executive Director, Human Rights Commission

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Janet Bullard

Introductions/Announcements/Process Update

Karen announced that she, her husband and six-year old daughter are happy to have been joined by a new addition to the family, newborn Abigail who is now a month old. Congratulations Karen and family!

Mary Claire announced that Tiffany Bluemle, Executive Director of Vermont Works for Women, won a rising star award from the Chittenden County Chamber of Commerce for her work with incarcerated women. She also announced that Vermont Works for Women had the ribbon cutting for their second modular home built by women at the Windsor State Correctional Facility yesterday afternoon in Springfield, Vermont. Congratulations Tiffany!

Joanna announced that the League of Women Voters would hold their Legislative Day on Wednesday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at the State House.

Marcia announced that Richard Cate, Commissioner of Education, would be joining us at 10:00 a.m. Also joining us is Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director of ALANA. Both will

speak about harassment and bullying. After hearing from our speakers, we will have a group discussion on this topic. Then at the December Commission meeting we will discuss where we go from here in regards to harassment and bullying.

### Vermont Women's History Project Update

Judith again reminded folk that women's history is year-round and not just in March. The goal of the women's history year-round campaign is to partner with other organizations that are hosting events on women's history. Judith distributed copies of the ideas for women's history year round project and asked folk to think about upcoming events and let her know of any ideas folk may have.

Judith also reported that she is working with the Lake Champlain Quadricentennial Committee and the Vermont Arts Council to develop a fun, artistic, and educational project related to the role women have played in the settling and development of Lake Champlain. She noted that the Vermont Arts Council is doing puzzles this year instead of pallets and that she is working with folk to develop six puzzles that will feature six individual women who played a role in the development of Lake Champlain. She further explained that each of these puzzles would be designed to be used as part of the Quad Curriculum for grades 3-8 and each puzzle will be accompanied by background and activities related to the woman featured in the puzzle.

### Minutes

Motion made by Mary Claire to accept the minutes with the following correction in Advisory Council Members Present - add 'Voters' after Vermont League of Women. Corrected version should read, "Vermont League of Women Voters". Seconded by Ruth Finn and voted unanimously.

### Girls Rock the Capital Program

Eileen reminded folk of our commitment to help sponsor an attendee in the Girls Rock the Capital Girl Scout Program made at the October Commission Meeting. Folk who want to make a donation should make a check payable to VCWERF, the Commission's Education and Research Foundation.

### Harassment and Bullying

Wendy introduced Richard Cate, the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Education, and Curtiss Reed, Jr., the Executive Director of ALANA.

Commissioner Cate stated that harassment and bullying occurs both between girls and boys and escalates as children grow. Commissioner Cate explained that harassment is protected by law and bullying is not. Because children spend most of their day in school, many feel that the schools should take

care of these issues even though harassment and bullying happen off school grounds as well. In cases where harassment meets the level specified in the law it needs to be dealt with according to the law. Many times the behavior is not reported.

Commissioner Cate believes that additional legislation is not needed. Need to teach people that harassment and bullying is not appropriate behavior and work on improving the school culture so that harassment and bullying does not occur at school or at all for that matter. Just because children congregate in the schools we cannot expect the schools to be the only ones dealing with harassment and bullying society needs to deal with these issues.

Commissioner Cate continued to state that the Department of Education does not have direct responsibility over schools when it comes to harassment and bullying. However, the Department does collect baseline information on harassment incidents, although the information is not of a specific nature, i.e., girl vs. girl, White vs. Hispanic, - report says that the complaint is based on gender or race so it is hard to get the exact picture of what type of harassment is occurring.

Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director of ALANA, reviewed ALANA's mission which is to educate people about their civil rights, cultivate leadership in civil rights K-12 and lastly to motivate people to be engaged in the democratic process beyond voting.

Curtiss explained that Act 91, the anti-harassment law, is arguably the most stringent law of this type in the country, however it does not do people any good if they do not know about it. He also explained that cyberbullying is, in fact, illegal and covered under existing telecommunications law which criminalizes disturbances by electronic means (Criminal Code Chapter 13, section 1027.) Curtiss noted that the schools are implementing the mechanics of the harassment policy, but not actually implementing the policy itself.

Curtiss stated that we need a strategic approach to the harassment and bullying issues; need to shift the focus from the school climate to the community. There needs to be a very clear mandate coming from local school boards that misconduct, harassment and bullying is just unacceptable. Parents need to be educated, local organizations need to serve as watchdogs, and resources need to be allocated toward anti-harassment and anti-bullying programs. Brattleboro has the only mandated social curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup> graders and that happened because it was included in the school budget. Parents need to be educated about harassment and bullying and what the schools policy is, what the law is and what the parent should expect.

Curtiss stated that we need to collect data on harassment and bullying. He noted that we also need to provide education about the policies (laws) that exist and make sure that schools distribute the policies to students, parents, and teachers.

What is our next step? What is the Commission's role in all of this?

Eileen started the group discussion stating that we would like participation of everyone, commissioners and advisors. We started this discussion by hearing about legislation that currently exists or is being debated by the legislature, we have heard from girls about their thoughts/concerns about harassment and bullying, and we have heard from the American Civil Liberties Union, Human Rights Commission, Department of Education, and ALANA.

Folk suggested that we define academic communities that are doing well in this area. Would like to know what is being done to empower girls? Allocate resources for ALANA in order for them to bring their work on these issues to the rest of the state. Put teeth in the legislation to enable the Department of Education more power in this area. We also need to gather more specific data to measure how big the problem is.

Marcia asked folk to spend some time before the December Commission meeting thinking about what other information is needed as part of this harassment/bullying discussion and is there anyone else that we need to hear from? Please get thoughts to Marcia as soon as possible.

Marcia reported that Robert Appel, Executive Director of the Vermont Human Rights Commission would be coming to the December Commission Meeting to share the survey that his department did regarding schools and their harassment policies.

Commissioners asked that a copy of the reporting template, referenced by Commissioner Cate, be obtained from the Department of Education and distributed to everyone.

Committee Time

Committee met and worked on various committee work. The Health, Safety and Civil Rights Committee asked that the Commission support the introduction of a bill supporting women who want to express breast milk at work.

Motion made by Mary Claire Carroll to support the introduction and movement of a bill stating that employers must allow breastfeeding mothers reasonable, unpaid break times to express milk and make a reasonable attempt to provide a private location for her to do and prohibiting discrimination against breastfeeding mothers. Seconded by Vicky Young and voted unanimously.

Plus/Delta Evaluation

Carol asked folk for feedback about today's meeting what worked for folk, and what could be changed.

## Went Well

Order of meeting

Discussion that Eileen facilitated that followed the presentation

Having some committee time

Everyone was engaged

Quick support on motion

Tremendous expertise we have around the table

Number of people contributed to the meeting

## Could be done better

Having speakers stay to respond to ideas

More committee time

Wanting more of the presenters, but hard due to time constraints

Fewer items to cover, but more in depth, more time for issues

Chair felt like a tyrant

Leading Plus/Delta next month is Gretchen Bailey.

Meeting adjourned at 12:32 p.m.