

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill, Chair; Gretchen Bailey; Eileen Boland; Cary Brown; Carol Buchdahl; Ann Cardinal; Laine Dunham; Retta Dunlap; Ruth Finn; Karen Henry; Susie Hudson; Anne McClaughry; Peg Martin; and Marion Milne.

Commissioners Absent: Sharon Baade and Cathy Frey.

Advisors Present: Tiffany Bluemle representing Vt. Works for Women, Joanne Brooking representing Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Linda Ingold representing Vt. Women's Business Center, Sarah Kenney representing Vt. Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and Sheila Reed, Voices for Vermont's Children.

Guests: Jill Evans, Director of Women and Family Services, Department of Corrections; Cara Gleason, Kids A Part program, Vt Children's Aid Society; Mary Alice McKenzie, Boys and Girls Club; Judy Pransky, long time childcare provider; Kristen Warner, Vermont Early Educators United.

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

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Janet Bullard

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

Welcome/Introductions/Minutes of February 9, 2011

Marcia announced that Sharon Baade has submitted a letter of resignation from the commission due to work commitments with her new assignment with the Girl Scouts. Anne McClaughry moved that the Commission recognize Sharon's contributions and service to the Commission and stated that we will sorely miss her. Seconded by Carol Buchdahl and voted unanimously. Marcia will see that a letter is sent to Sharon thanking her for her service to the Commission.

Janet and Lilly updated folk on upcoming events sponsored by the Commission:

- The next Vermont Girls Collaborative Discussion Series to be held on Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup> at the Capitol Plaza. Topic is Race.
- Recognition of Vermont women veterans on March 23<sup>rd</sup> in collaboration with the Vermont Women's History Project of the Vermont Historical Society and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The Commission has organized a noontime panel of women veterans sharing their experiences at the request of the women's legislative caucus.
- The Commission's Film Festival Listening Forum scheduled for Saturday, March 26<sup>th</sup> from 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. in Brattleboro.
- The Central Vermont Workforce Investment Board is hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Career/Job Fair on April 7<sup>th</sup> from 9:00a.m. – 5:00p.m. at the Montpelier Elks/Country Club in Montpelier. Janet is co-chair of the planning committee; Lilly is doing the media coverage for the fair. To date almost 800 students from local schools are participating in the morning career fair session. Hopefully

there will be a good turnout of job seekers in the afternoon. Fifteen non-profit resource agencies and approximately 50 for profit businesses have registered.

Janet announced that April 1<sup>st</sup> would be Lilly's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Commission. Everyone congratulated Lilly on this milestone.

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl to approve the minutes of the February 9, 2011 Commission Meeting as submitted. Seconded by Laine Dunham and voted unanimously.

#### Women in the Correctional System: the proposed move to Chittenden County

Tiffany Bluemle, Executive Director of Vermont Works for Women (VWW), gave an overview of programs offered by VWW including modular home construction and transitional jobs. VWW has been offering programming for over ten years with assistance from many partners. Tiffany noted that the proposed move of the women to the Chittenden Correctional Center (CCC) will be the third move in eight years and that there are serious implications for the women. She shared a number of concerns that she had about the move and her vision of what a holistic approach to services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women might look like.

Cara Gleason explained that she is one of three staff members that run the Kids A Part program at the Vt. Children's Aid Society. She and her co-workers offer groups in the schools with students whose parents are incarcerated. Cara noted that over 4,600 children in Vermont have a parent going in and out of corrections supervision each year. Cara stated that reports have shown that without proper intervention as many as 70% of children with parents in the correctional system will be in the system themselves some day.

The Kids A Part program provides counseling and support to approximately 80 women at the Northwest State Correctional Facility. In addition to individual counseling and parenting support, Kids A Part provides group counseling, activity groups, and stresses the importance of parents maintaining contact with their children. Kids A Part staff work a lot in Chittenden County with school social workers, including how to talk about and think about incarceration, what to share, how to help kids deal with what other kids are saying, and outreach for older kids. They also run activity groups for kids in the community to bring them together. Their programming is Chittenden County based right now, but they would like to bring it to the rest of the state. Cara said that the proposed move of women inmates to the Chittenden facility is an opportunity to do things differently and is very exciting.

Jill Evans, Women and Family Services Coordinator with the Department of Corrections, informed everyone that in the past two moves there has been an underlying mantra that women will not lose anything. However, she noted that the Chittenden County facility was built to be a detention center and lacks many of the elements that are required of a state prison. There is very little outside space and very little programming space, currently available at CCC. Chittenden is a detention facility and not intended to house inmates for a period of time.

H.97 Right of Childcare Workers to form a union to negotiate with the state over issues under the state's control

Mary Alice McKenzie, Executive Director of Boys and Girls Club of Burlington, informed everyone that Burlington is one of 6 clubs around state and the umbrella organization is Boys and Girls Club of America. Six clubs meet regularly and there are 20 boys and girls club sites around the state and all vary in terms of focus. Some sites serve children k-12<sup>th</sup> grade, some sites serve only teenagers. There are three sites in Burlington as part of the Burlington Club. The Burlington sites see children living in very low-income families, 95% of children qualify for free and reduced lunch. The Burlington sites serve approximately 250 children a day.

Mary reported that she is sharing concerns on behalf of the Burlington club as well as the other clubs statewide about H. 97. She feels that lack of respect for childcare providers is a real issue and the bill will not change that. She feels that collective bargaining will not solve the main problem that is lack of respect for childcare providers. The Boys and Girls Club opposes the inclusion of licensed centers in the bill. She noted that other states that have such a law do not include center-based providers.

Although some of the children who attend the Boys and Girls Clubs have the state subsidy, it is a very small part of their budget. She stated that their Board of Directors is concerned that having such a law would hurt their private funding raising efforts. The requirement that all agencies receiving a subsidy report their staff four times a year would be a tremendous burden for large providers such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA. They are also opposed to requiring all employees to either join the union or pay a reduced "agency fee" if they chose not to join the union. There is also an issue with being considered public employees vs. being considered private employees, which is philosophical. The club is not anti collective bargaining. If employees of boys and girls club decide that they want to be part of a collective bargaining unit then the board would agree with their employees.

In closing, Alice informed everyone that the Boys and Girls Club has worked really hard to increase pay and benefits for their program staff to be commensurate with that of entry level teachers, their average hourly rate is \$16.00, with benefits the average compensation is \$20.00 an hour. The Boys and Girls Club doesn't wish to be part of a collective bargaining process. Policy issues that they are concerned about are not covered under this proposed legislation. Those issues are quality of early childhood education, and access to quality childcare. There are things the state can do to improve quality, access and affordability.

Judy Pransky, a child care provider, spoke in favor of the bill.. She stated that she has developed various childcare programs over the years and eventually built a childcare center, and owned and operated nine (9) Vermont licensed childcare facilities including the first employer-sponsored childcare facility in the state. She has served over 7,000 children and employed over 500 employees. She informed everyone that the people doing childcare work across the state weren't in it for the money, but because they care about children.

Due to a recent change in regulations, many providers no longer qualify for an increased subsidy based on their program's meeting quality standards (known as the STARS program) simply because the home care provider or center director lacks a bachelor's degree. H.97 is an effort to for providers to have a seat at the table, when rules and regulations are proposed.

H.97 would create a collective bargaining unit for childcare providers where they can collectively bargain about issues of quality, certification, regulation, benefits, and increased funding for childcare programs. Through the process of a union they would become officially recognized and force conversations to be taken more seriously. Fourteen other states currently have collective bargaining for home care providers, not centers.

As H.97 is currently written, there would be four specific bargaining units. It doesn't include school-based programs or stand-alone after school programs. Everyone who provides direct care to children would be eligible to join the union. Home providers would get to represent themselves and have the same voice as a center director. The bill as currently written does not tie early educators to the American Federation of Teachers Union.

In closing, Judy stated that this is really about providing the best early childhood education to our future generation as we possibly can. It is an investment in our future and an important one.

Eileen Boland reported that she did some research on what other states have done. Five of the fourteen states passed legislation to enact some type of collective bargaining. Nine states issued executive orders, three other states' legislatures passed laws and then the Governors of those states vetoed them. Eileen stated that she obtained this information from the study that was done by the National Women's Law Center in 2010 and that she would forward the link to the study to everyone. She encouraged folk to concentrate on the appendix of the study.

Women in the Correctional System: the proposed move to Chittenden County : (continued) A number of questions about the move were raised. Since there is so little space to provide programs inside the facility, it might cost a lot to provide programs outside the walls of the facility. Potential savings might be negated. At this point there appears to be a lack of hard data. If the move is all about saving money, and not reducing recidivism and the data does not show that moving the women will save money then why move them women and disrupt the programs that have been established at Northwest Correctional Facility. Jill agreed to forward data to the commission for discussion.

Anne McLaughry moved that at this juncture, the Commission oppose the Department of Corrections plan to move women out of the Northwest State Correctional Facility because the commission has not seen quantifiable data that the move will definitely save money. Seconded by Carol Buchdahl.

A discussion ensued; Carol called the question. Motion to call the question passed and a vote was taken on Anne's motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 12:36 p.m.