



Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes

April 9th, 2014
State House Ethan Allen Room
Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Eileen Boland,
Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett
Dr. Felicia Kornbluh,
Ruth Finn, Danielle Martel,
Nancy LaVarnway, Gretchen Bailey
Ariel Wengroff, Jennie Gartner

Commissioners absent:

Susie Hudson, Laine Dunham,
Shambulia Gadsden Sams,
Cathy Frey, Marion Milne

Advisors present: Tricia Coates representing Congressman Peter Welch, Diane Derby representing Senator Patrick Leahy, Sarah Kenney representing the Network for Domestic and Sexual Violence, Sue Racanelli representing the League of Women Voters, and Margaret Luce representing the Vermont State Nurses' Association.

Guests: Ann Dibernardo, Robin Lloyd

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert, Claire Greene

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Welcome/Introductions

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked everyone present to introduce themselves. Cary gave an overview of the resolution honoring VCW's 50th anniversary that was read on the House floor earlier this morning.

Approval February 2013 minutes

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Eileen Boland:
To approve the minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED

Approval FY2015 Meeting Schedule:

Motion made by Ruth Finn, seconded by Danielle Martell:

To approve the meeting schedule as submitted with the one correction to change October 8th meeting location from women's expo to the city hall.

MOTION APPROVED

50th Anniversary Event Overview and Prep

Staff gave an overview of the night's event, followed by a screening of VCW's 50th anniversary slide show.

Legislative Update

Cary provided an update on legislation:

Minimum wage: Yesterday the House approved a minimum wage law proposing a \$10.10 increase to go into effect starting January 1st 2015. The legislation is now being discussed in the Senate. The legislature has proposed a summer study to better understand the impact on Vermonters if a livable wage were enacted.

Paid sick days: Legislative leaders decided not to bring it to the floor of the house. Currently, the Paid Sick Days Coalition is working hard to get the right information to businesses in order to counteract some incorrect messages. At a Pathways from Poverty Council, Governor Shumlin was reported saying that some of the strongest opponents were Democratic legislators.

Ideas from those present:

- Find poster child businesses
- Regional approaches. (For example, towns that fall close to the Canadian or New Hampshire border would need to be educated differently from those in central Vermont.)

H790 is an active bill affecting Reach Up benefits for Vermonters. The main purpose of this bill is to help working families make more money while still keeping their benefits. Current funding proposals being considered may reduce some benefits. Cary read a letter from Chris Curtis at Vermont Legal Aid which asks the legislature to find a different funding source. The Commission has been asked by advocates to weigh in on the proposal.

Motion to support and sign the letter with the intent of finding funding sources for increasing public assistance benefits that don't reduce other benefits.

Motion made by Carol, seconded by Felicia.

MOTION APPROVED

Sarah Kenney offered a legislative update on a bill that the Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is advocating for:

In response to pressure from gun groups, language in the firearms storage bill is being rewritten to reach a compromise. After the bill passed in the house, gun rights advocates told senators they no longer support legislation to create storage facilities for firearms relinquished by people subject to relief from abuse orders. The group's main claim against the bill is that the inability to hold these arms takes away from the safety of the family to protect itself.

The Judiciary Committee is considering rewriting legislation the House passed last month with a new provision proposing cheaper storage systems. Sarah reported the Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs have been strong supporters of safe storage and helpful with drafting the bill. She is hopeful there will be an agreement ready tomorrow for the Senate Finance Committee.

Women in Corrections

Excerpts from past minutes discussing DOC's move of women to CRCF were handed out to Commissioners. Cary addressed the potential to utilize these statements to ensure DOC objectives/goals stated for the move are being carried out. This year the Women's Caucus has approached Cary to help hold a summit over the summer at VT Law School on women in corrections. The following are some ideas proposed of how VCW can work with the Caucus to make meaningful changes:

- Implementing gender responsive & trauma informed policy and practice.
- Address issues of physical and psychological health, health care access
- Curbing short term sentences to reduce lives on the outside becoming tremendously interrupted (i.e. Methadone treatment, housing, benefits, jobs)
- Gather information and provide a report. (It was stressed that such report would not be another white paper.)
 - Utilize students from UVM and VT Law to compile data.
 - Rather than having a report coming solely from the Commission, it was recommended by many to build collaboration to have more voices and momentum in the conversation.
- Discussion of the NIC Report and, specifically, ways to utilize the document to check on progress, accountability and outcomes of the CRCF move.
- Request made by Commissioners to have staff follow up on the study to provide more background info, to gather what NIC best practices are, and get a sense of legislatures that are interested.
- Suggestion made to be wary of differing views within the police, public safety and DOC staff, and P&P around women in corrections
- Is there a gender bias with non-violent offenders? Time to step back and look at how the women are actually getting to prison. Look into the data around the entire incarceration process from the arrest (police), to sentencing (judiciary/courts), to the operations within the facility (practice and policies of administration, CO's, staff, and contractors).

Commissioners requested time in the next meeting's agenda to discuss further steps and encouraged staff to keep momentum moving forward with the Women's Caucus until then.

Announcements

No announcements.

Meeting adjourned at 3:25pm.