



Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

February 12, 2014

Pavilion Office Building, 4th floor conference room
Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

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

Commissioners absent:

Cathy Frey, Marion Milne,
Shambulia Gadsden Sams,
Dr. Felicia Kornbluh, Susie Hudson

Advisors present: Traci Sawyer and Becky Raymond representing Building Bright Futures, Sue Racanelli representing VT League of Women Voters,

Guests: Kim Brittenham from Vermont Center for Independent Living, Professor Cheryl Hanna, Vermont Law School and Karen Richards, Executive Director of Vermont Human Rights Commission.

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert, Claire Greene

Interns: Ellen Ricker

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Welcome/Introductions: Marcia welcomed everyone and those present to introduce themselves.

Approval November 2013 minutes

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Eileen Boland:

To approve the minutes as submitted. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Staff Update

- Cary announced that VCW's budget testimony went through the House Appropriations Committee last week and there is a possibility of heading to the Senate House Appropriations Committee as well.
- Cary recently submitted a Letter of Interest to the Vermont Community Foundation requesting funding for an expanded version of the Women and Girls Status Report. Vermont's report would mimic the report done by Colorado (copies passed around) done in partnership with IWPR.
- **Schedule update of upcoming meetings:**

March: Following the meeting on March 12th is the annual Women's History Month event. This year's celebration will highlight women in the arts with a panel discussion from 12:00 - 1:00 pm in the Auditorium of the Pavilion Building, followed by a reception in the Snelling Room of the Vermont History Museum from 1:00 - 2:00 pm.

April: Later meeting from 12:30-3:30 followed by signature 50th anniversary celebration.

May: Regular meeting time and place on the 14th

June: The June 11th meeting (10:00am-2:30pm) will take place at the Dean Center in Springfield. This meeting will be followed by an education and leadership presentation/discussion featuring CCV president Joyce Judy. Likely to include catered sandwiches for lunch. Commissioner suggestions of what to focus on:

- STEM and nontraditional careers
- Financial literacy
- Female legislatures from surrounding towns highlighting their journey
- What do these young women need from us?
- Successful women in the corporate arena

50th Anniversary Discussion:

- Major development on VCW history slide show to be showcased in the Card Room.
- Staff went on a state house walk to plan event layout.
- Invitations (hard copy and electronic) are currently being designed. Both versions will ask attendees to RSVP.
- Food and drink menu being developed.
- Potential for piano music.

Equal Pay

Cary introduced both Karen Richards, Executive Director of Human Rights Commission and Professor Cheryl Hanna from Vermont Law School to discuss an equal pay case is currently pending against the state.

VCW has been asked to take a lead on an amicus brief. Cheryl entered the conversation via a conference call to clarify how the amicus brief might unfold.

Because this is a case against the state, Cary asked the Commission what they would like to keep in mind. Some responses were:

- Focus on legislative intent and interpretation, how this case plays into a larger context of gendered disparity.
- Remember that we are a friend of the court; our role is to aid and educate the court about the law, the proper legal standard and the possible consequences if the state was in violation.
- New strategy? Potentially could go forth in support of neither party rather than in support of the plaintiff. This would position the Commission to support workplace equality for women in a

broader context. There was some concern about how this might signal to the court that Commission does not fully support the plaintiffs.

- Suggestion to take a strong position when writing the amicus brief without any statements that would place the Commission's reputation at stake.

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl to file an amicus brief in support of the plaintiff.

Motion seconded by Charlotte Dennett. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Women in Corrections

Marcia reminded those present that the January meeting was cancelled so that commissioners could visit CRCF for a tour and listening forum. Those who attended reported the following:

- Large number of women incarcerated due to lack of housing
- Many inmates held there for "protection from themselves"
- High rates of incarcerated youth
- Incidents of mental health, lack of clinicians
- Lack of programming to reduce recidivism and rehabilitate
- Drug treatment needed in the facility
- Listening forum with probation and parole office around issues of violation and furlough.
- No outside work camp for the women who are trying to reduce their sentence, other job training for reduced sentences
- Praise for Kids-A-Part Program
- High levels of learning disabilities
- Empty library shelves
- Immediate facility amenities: food, heat, blankets
- Female inmate disruption when male detainees are brought in

Small but important next steps:

- Kim from VCIL is following up with Jen Sprafke who has requested a mental health facility assessment.
- Request to have someone from P&P attend a VCW meeting to educate Commissioners about their process and protocol with female parolees.
- Getting books back in the facility
- Begin drafting a letter of recommendation to the governor, perhaps a task force

Marcia advised commissioners to submit all other recommendations to Cary this week.

Cary noted that there are several bills in the legislature that focus on corrections. Potential changes might include:

- Detainees that are primary care providers will be able to utilize home detention
- Inmates over the age of 18 will no longer need to be handed to a responsible adult upon release.
- Make family court the default standard for 16 and 17 year olds to reduce youth with records

Legislative Update

Cary passed out an abbreviated list of the bills VCW is watching during the 2014 session. Ellen, one of the Commission's legislative interns, gave a brief overview of the committee meetings she has been attending. Cary passed out the latest version of H208 bill that includes the following new provisions:

- Substitute teachers and per diem healthcare workers
- Five and under employees
- Seasonal employees
- Probationary period for either 60 days or 240 hours (whichever benchmark comes later)

Cary emphasized the sexual and domestic violence provisions of this bill. Currently 60,000 Vermonters do not have access to paid sick leave, many of whom are women who are also the primary care providers to children and aging parents.

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl to support the H208 in its current legislative state. If unreasonable changes should occur within this bill, the Commission has given staff permission to withdraw their support. Motion seconded by Lane Dunham. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Announcements

Early childhood Day in the State House will take place after the Commission's March 12th business meeting. Becky Raymond from Building Bright Futures encourages Commissioners to swing by and support this event.

Meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.