

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

January 15 2015

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

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Nancy LaVarnway
Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl
Laine Dunham, Melinda Moulton
Ruth Finn, Dr. Felicia Kornbluh,
Kerry Secrest, Charlotte Dennett

Commissioners absent:

Gretchen Bailey, Jennie Gartner
Lynn Batchelor, Danielle Martel
Shambulia Gadsden Sams, Suzie Hudson

Staff: Cary Brown, Claire Greene

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Interns: Becca White

Advisors: Katarina Lisaius representing Office of Senator Bernie Sanders, Pam Greene representing Mercy Connections, Jill Myers representing Women Business Owner's Network

Guests: Cheryl Dersch

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

Approval of December 2014 minutes

Motion to approve these three minutes as submitted

Motion made by Melinda Moulton, seconded by Eileen Boland.

MOTION APPROVED

Marcia reviewed the 2015 goals for VCW programs, activities and events and the roles of the executive director and commissioners for achieving them. Commissioners were asked to review these goals and be prepared to discuss them next month.

Staff/Events and Updates

VCW's FY2016 budget has been approved by the Department of Finance and Management but pending final approval from the legislature.

Events:

- The Legislative Luncheon, directly following the meeting, will begin around noon and include speeches from Marcia and Cary followed by a short game hosted by Carol and Danielle.
- Women's History Month Brownbag Lunch Event, in collaboration with Vermont Historical Society, will take place Wednesday March 11th from 12-1pm at Vermont History Museum (Pavilion Building 109 State Street, Montpelier). VCW will have a regular –but shortened– business meeting before the event. This years event will feature a panel discussion on women's history with VCW Commissioner/Director of UVM's Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program/Associate Professor of History Dr. Felicia Kornbluh; Independent scholar and author Lyn Blackwell; and Holly Allen, Assistant Professor of American Studies at Middlebury College.
- Equal Pay Day is the annual symbolic day when women's earnings finally catch up to men's. 2015 Equal Pay Day will be all day on Tuesday, April 14th in the card room in the state house. The Women's Caucus has agreed to be in partnership and BPW will help compose an equal pay

proclamation that the governor will sign. Felicia and Melinda are interested in helping with this event.

Legislative Updates:

- Earned sick time
 - About to be introduced in the Senate by Rep. Philip Baruth.
 - Senate changes from last year's bill:
 - Protections for those who take sick time
 - A waiting period before sick time can be taken
 - House also has a new version of the bill. Likely to include Senate's limitations as well as:
 - A maximum number of days employees can take off
 - An eligibility threshold for employers above a certain size.
 - Concerns voiced about how legislative health care changes are affecting conversations on earned sick time.
- Universal background checks for gun purchases
 - Of particular interested to VCW because the rate of homicide is 16 percent lower in states that currently have this law. New law would require background checks when guns are bought or traded through informal settings like the Internet. Gun Sense Vermont is advocating for a waiting period for gun purchases.
- Licensed dental practitioner
 - Provides dental care to rural low-income communities and career avenues for female hygienists.
- New office of the child advocate
 - Will establishing a new role within state government to oversee child and family protective services for the entire state.
- Sugar sweetened beverage tax:
 - Some commissioners argue this bill would disproportionately affect Vermonters with lower income and others are in favor of the health benefits it would encourage. If commissioners and advisors want more information, Felicia knows folks at Vermont Legal Aid and Hunger Free Vermont who can answer questions on why/how this bill is getting drafted.

“Change the Story” Partnership:

Updates from the last meeting (1/9/2015):

- Members include: Cary Brown, Eileen Boland, Claire Greene, Meg Smith, Jen Peterson, Susan Mccaslin, Carolyn Weir, Annie Crawford, Christa Chute, Tiff Bluemle and Lucy Comstock-Gay
- Working towards a model for the discussion making process and vocabulary used to describe different roles within the partnership.
- Brainstormed a list of current initiatives for potential alignment, but have not yet determined the collaborative work of the partnership
- Starting slow in order to move fast— hopeful about picking up momentum soon.
- Each organization listed things they are already doing to find greater opportunities for collaboration
- Overall, everyone left the meeting feeling good about the group and involved.

Commissioner general thoughts and ideas:

- Better name needed— don't like the word story because it doesn't reflect the real lived poverty of women in the state
- Request to have comprehensive notes taken and distributed to the rest of the Commission for greater involvement
- Persistent focus on wages needed – government benefits are not enough (i.e. sick days)
 - Historical trends in women's wages
 - Relationship between unions and impacts on wages
 - Bring Vermont DOL to the table
 - Nursing contracts
 - Underemployment
 - Economic health

All commissioner thoughts on the status report can be emailed to Cary. Staff will provide a comprehensive catch-up email with all previous partnership documents and meeting notes.

Discussion of “Call to Action” Agenda:

A “Call to Action” draft was passed out at the conference and revisions have been made to include suggestions made by attendees. This handout is that next iteration. Once finalized, the committee will be asking members to sign on and uphold at least one section of the agenda.

Commissioner feedback:

- Explicitly state *publicly funded* affordable healthcare for women
- Glad STEM was added to educational development
- Appreciative of the commitment to a bipartisan approach

Other commissioner feedback:

- Invite those who are still legislatively pushing for universal healthcare reform to next meeting.
 - Have experts attend each meeting who can address the Commission's top issues.
 - Topic/expert suggestions: gun law, healthcare, earned sick time, wages, corrections, and women's perspective on healthcare financing.
 - Perspectives on health care expressed:
 - Concern for the Commission getting ahead of itself (much of what happens in Vermont will depend on the federal level, which is undecided and tumultuous.)
 - Others think that Vermont can pave the way/be the first to enact universal healthcare and put pressure on the rest of the country. What are the ways in which Vermont could still do this?
 - Look at pre-existing healthcare proposals currently in the state house (that have been born in the wake of universal healthcare). VCW needs to better understand and examine these alternatives. Subsequent request to compile a descriptive guide to these other medical care proposals.
 - Invite legislator guests that can give a full run down of what's on deck for this session and to better understand the makeup of the 2015-2016 House and Senate

By February 23rd commissioners should send their ideas of what they want in the status of women and girls report to Eileen. A reminder email will be sent to commissioners with:

- Links to other states public life reports

- A list of the top priorities that have come out of the partnership to vote on

Announcements:

- Nancy LaVarnway has replaced Eileen Boland as chair of the VCW Education Committee
- Friday March 13th is the UVM Race, Gender and Sexuality Conference
- PPNNE/Roe v. Wade event next Thursday, January 22nd 9-2pm, Room 10 of the State House
- Felicia Korbluh has been selected for the next Emerge Vermont class

Meeting adjourned at 11:15am