

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

June 11th, 2014

CCV Springfield Campus, Dean Center, Room B214

Springfield, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Eileen Boland,
Carol Buchdahl, Jennie Gartner
Ruth Finn, Danielle Martel, Cathy Frey
Marion Milne, Laine Dunham

Commissioners absent:

Susie Hudson, Nancy E. LaVarnway
Shambulia Gadsden Sams,
Gretchen Bailey, Ariel Wengroff
Dr. Felicia Kornbluh, Charlotte Dennett

Advisors present: Louise Luring representing the American Association of University Women, Diane Derby representing US Senator Patrick Leahy

Guests:

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert, Claire Greene

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Welcome/Introductions

Marcia welcomed everyone and introduced Melinda Moulton, VCW's newly appointed commissioner to replace Ariel Wengroff, who will officially begin her term on July 1, 2014. Melinda gave a brief overview of the work she does which primarily focuses on women and poverty. Those present were asked to introduce themselves.

Approval May 2014 minutes

MOTION made by Laine Dunham, seconded by Carol Buchdahl:

To approve the minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED

Advisory Council Proposal

VCW is exploring ways to make the Advisory Council a more useful and meaningful body both for the commission and for the council members. Cary passed around a draft of the proposal to change the operating guidelines of the Advisory Council. Proposed changes include:

- Rather than a single representative, member organizations can send whomever they like
- Have no set term, commissioners would vote to change members
- Members will be welcome to attend meetings, but are not obligated and should not feel as though they are not fulfilling their duties if unable to attend
- Members are welcome, but not obliged, to be involved in a committee as a non-voting member
- Members are welcome to attend two meetings a year that are specifically geared toward Advisory Council members: one in the fall that focuses on legislative priorities and one in the spring that focuses on programmatic priorities. These will be in addition to regularly scheduled business meetings.

Cary currently has a long list of suggestions about possible new members. This list will be finalized shortly and hopefully put up for a vote at the fall meeting.

An open, two-fold discussion followed that addressed (1) approving the changes of the new policy and (2) potential new members to be added to the Advisory Council.

Motion to accept two amendments to the proposal: (1) to exclude the list of new members and (2) the removal of the second sentence of the second paragraph of the proposal. Motion amendments made by Carol Buchdahl and seconded by Laine Dunham.

MOTION: to approve the advisory council operating guidelines as submitted with amendments.

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Laine Dunham.

MOTION APPROVED

Other thoughts on the Advisory Council were as follows:

- Overall, a strong support for proposal by Advisory Council members present
 - Provides members an opportunity to have more of a voice
 - An appreciation for the two meeting structure where their voice is not only heard but the central focus
 - Members will benefit from enhanced digital communication and networking made by the Commission
- A suggestion to rotate between the delegates and not require all present at each meeting.

Recommendation to have just one member from one office who can report back to any other delegates.

- Take a logistical look at how we gather our advisors and consider travel and expense for those who are uncompensated staff. The commission could take a more proactive role in knitting these logistical aspects together to service member needs.

Discussion of adding Advisory Council members:

- Higher turnover could create more opportunity for diversity of opinions
- Questions raised around the partisanship of members
- Appreciation for the delegation presence within the Commission
- The need for a more objective & nonpartisan process for prospective members. A suggestion for an application or questionnaire outlining the goals and objectives of the organization. This uniform process might make the Advisory Council list feel less “handpicked” and ensure greater diversity.
- Comment made that there are just too many prospective organizations for this process to not become selective and subjective.
- Application process might stunt member diversity
- Request to see if there are any statewide organizations addressing housing and homelessness (rather than COTS which only serves Chittenden County).

Carol, Laine, Marion and Eileen volunteered to help develop a process for selecting Advisory Council members.

Women in Corrections

At last month’s meeting, Commissioners requested that VCW staff find out what DOC data for women is currently being collected. Cary passed out a list of women’s data extracted from the VTDOC Facts and Figures Annual Report. Those present reviewed the document and discussed the following:

- Request to look more at the three year recidivism rates
- More data on women and education, how they fall in areas of their personal life.
- Clarification of DOC language (i.e. what is a “serious felony”?)
- Number of women on probation and why they are being sent back
- Questions around male law enforcement bias. For example, is there difference between the gender of the probation officer and the number of women being sent back?
- Look at individual judges around the state and their sentencing practices. Who is sending who to prison for comparable crimes?

Data to be looked at specifically for the women in corrections summit in September:

- Age and gender make-up of first time offenders
- Test the assumptions that we are making, is there actual VT data that supports these?
- Workcrew for women
- Equity issues in facilities: work readiness, skill acquiring opportunities and reentry services opportunities for male vs. female

Summit on Corrections:

The purpose of the September 30 summit will be to energize and reinvigorate the discussion around women in corrections in Vermont by bringing together all parties involved in the criminal justice process: P&P, judges, attorneys, contracted organizations within the facility, police officers, etc. The primary focus will be looking back at the Incarcerated Women's Initiative (IWI) while looking forward to next steps.

Cary reviewed the panel ideas for the summit and asked Commissioners to offer feedback:

Panel # 1: The history of incarcerated women in Vermont:

Including issues specific to incarcerated women, the growth of incarcerated women in Vermont leading up to the IWI, and the story of the IWI (how it worked, successes challenges, what happened to it, etc.).

Panel #2: Where we are now, the current status of incarcerated women:

Includes a chance to review the white paper, understand key issues happening on the inside and an opportunity to have recent formerly incarcerated women speak. discussion. *Commissioner suggestions:* Find women who went through the move to CRCF and can speak to the difference between facilities. Incarcerated women with children?

Panel #3: What do corrections offer women now—inside and out?

Likely to be a broader conversation, hear more from formerly incarcerated women about their concerns and needs. Additional issues to be discussed such as housing, visitation, custody issues, etc.

Commissioner suggestions: contact Christine Bullard, Police Social Worker within the Bellows Falls Police Department and Springfield Police Department.

Panel #4: What is working elsewhere and next steps, including a longer Q&A discussion of priorities.

Commissioner suggestion: invite someone from the Maine Department of Corrections

Staff Updates

The Vermont Summit on Working Families is tomorrow from 4-6pm. Madeleine Kunin is the keynote speaker. The goal of the Summit is to gather interests and priorities from the group to bring to the White House Summit on Working Families later this month. Cary requests that Commissioners also send their ideas of what issues she should take with her.

The Unfished Agenda Conference is coming up this November. The conference is a collaboration between the Vermont Commission on Women, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, New Hampshire Women's Initiative, U.S. DOL Women's Bureau, and the Women's Fund of Rhode Island. Any ideas for breakout sessions to have at this conference should be submitted to Cary. Some suggestions brought up at the meeting were:

- How to get the 20-30 year old involved in women's issues. Who is going to finish it?
- Looking at it from a more nuanced generational perspective that is welcoming and inclusive to all ages, symbiotic and reciprocal.
- Framing the discussion as a family issues, i.e. paid sick leave for all parents
- Incarcerated women
- Universal Pre-k

Other updates:

- Marion has volunteered to be another volunteer for the Legislative Luncheon in January.
- Did not receive grant from the Vermont Community Foundation. Cary is welcoming suggestions for other funding sources for a comprehensive data report. Perhaps combine 2 or 3 different organizations for funding?
- Silloway case has been on hold for a while, another round of mediation to happen soon.

Announcements

- Save the date for WEOC - September 20th @ VTC.
 - Donna Carpenter from Burton will be the keynote
 - New coaching sessions will be offered
 - Focus once again will be on social media

Lilly passed around a thank you letter from Alex Stetter, a VCW intern who worked in the Statehouse this winter and spring.

Meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.