

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

November 13, 2013

Pavilion Office Building, 4th floor conference room

Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

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

Commissioners absent:

Shambulia Gadsen Sams, Susie Hudson
Charlotte Dennett

Advisors present: Traci Sawyer representing Building Bright Futures, Becky Raymond representing Building Bright Futures, Sarah Kenney representing Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Patricia Coates representing Congressman Peter Welch's Office, Sue Racanelli representing Vermont League of Women Voters.

Guests:

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert, Claire Greene

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Welcome/Introductions

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked those present to discuss something exciting happening in their lives right now.

Approval October 2013 minutes

MOTION made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Ruth Finn:

To approve the minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED

Staff updates

Lilly and Cary recently attended a Vermont Women's History Project Steering Committee meeting which focused on current changes to the website and plans for the future. Lilly passed around postcards from the Vermont Historical Society for the 2014 Vermont History Expo happening this June.

Cary updated the commission on the Act 31, paid leave, Enough Said Task Force, Early Childhood Alliance and Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant.

Act 31

Staff is currently increasing outreach and education around Act 31 with an emphasis on flexible working arrangements going into effect this January. Lilly made publications for both employers and employees that will be finalized within the coming week. Once available, Lilly requests the Commissioners help staff disseminate these documents statewide. Cary briefly discussed the workshop she helped moderate at the Women's Economic Opportunity Conference last month alongside Assistant Attorney General Julio Thompson and Beth Sachs of Vermont Energy Investment Corporation. In addition, Cary has presented Act 31 to sociology students at CCV and participants in the Vermont Public Managers Program, and will be presenting to the Burlington chapter of Business and Professional Women this evening.

Paid Leave

Paid sick days coalition is gearing up for legislation strategies. Paid family leave study committee is almost filled with all the appointed members needed. The group will have the chance to meet one or two more times before a formal proposal must be submitted to the governor.

Enough Said Task Force

The Enough Said Task Force is coming to the end of the 6 month time limit at which point a report must be submitted. Recommendations will be formally presented to the governor at a press conference in mid-December. Cary focused on the financial literacy aspect of this prospective policy. Her team is close to finalizing the recommendation that personal finance classes be integrated into high school curriculum. Commissioner responses to the report were:

- Recommendation to utilize Bank of America's online curriculum which has a good reputation for appealing to young people.
- Others are hesitant to advocate for any Bank of America entity due to the company's negative customer service image.
- Noted that Khan Academy provides free math education.
- Look into local credit union webinars and other Vermont based resources. Vermont Security Division is willing to visit schools and teach programs for free.

Marcia asked commissioners to forward any more comments to Cary via email. The task force is also including a second recommendation that students receive financial information that is relative to what they want to do. The financial literacy group believes this matching process will engage the local businesses community more directly.

Early Childhood Alliance

Governor's early childhood summit took place at the end of last month. The framework created prior to the event was very broad and open-ended as it tried to encompass as many aspects/voices as possible. Many discussions happening around action planning and goals but the governor is still in the process of reviewing the framework.

Race to the Top Grant Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTTT-ELC)

Document is available now to download online from the governor's site. This federal grant, if awarded, would be used for one-time investments aimed at strengthening and expanding the state's current early childhood systems and networks. Rather than starting from scratch, Race to the Top initiative offers the funding to reinforce and universalize the pre-existing childhood framework.

Claire reported that the Commission's preliminary budget proposal was approved by Commissioner Reardon. Around mid-December, Budget & Management will issue finalized budget targets to be balanced promptly thereafter.

VCW 50th anniversary planning

Marcia asked if there were any commissioners who would volunteer to chair the 50th anniversary. Nancy and Cathy volunteered as co-chairs. Cary reviewed some main discussion points from the anniversary planning conference call on Tuesday:

- All Taking Your Place at the Table events with the women and leadership theme should also be branded with 50th anniversary label. Currently Carol, Jennie, Eileen and Danielle are all confirmed events.
- There was a proposal to have VCW's May meeting coincide with the Taking your Place at the Table event happening at Carol's in southern Vermont to expand the Commission's visibility.
- The larger signature event will happen either April 8th, 9th or 10th

Commissioners were asked to brainstorm a list of women who could speak at the signature event, and in particular, individuals who could speak to the history of women in leadership. Cary also asked the Commissioners to think about the venue and suggestions were as follows:

- A gala in the State House that helps represent the milestones for women in the history of the Commission
- Mingle and eat in Cedar Creek room for a "cocktail hour" with snacks (allowing enough time for guests time to peruse historical visuals) then transition into the chamber of statehouse for speakers.
- No charge at the door, but encourage donations from attendees.
- Proposal for event sponsors and other forms of fundraising-- perhaps someone could host a website for the foundation to collect money.
- Request for "everybody stand up call out". (For example "if you have ever been discriminated against please stand up!").
- A retrospective video showing the history of past and present commissioners speaking. A suggestion made to take advantage of the governor's office media resources to ensure good documentation.
- Slideshows running pictures constantly throughout the night in various corners of the rooms.
- A female keynote is desired and Madeline Kunin is preferred.
- Have event intentionally in conjunction with Farmers' Night celebration.

- Wednesdays are not a good time for federal senators and representatives-- they are only here on the weekends.
- Keynote speaker with a Vermont connection.

Lilly thanked everyone for their contributions. Commissioners who have already signed up to host a Taking your Place at the Table event were asked to elaborate before the group. Jennie and Carol agreed to co-facilitate an event at Rutland High School in the fall. This March, Danielle is organizing a tabling event within the Women's Expo that will include information for Franklin County families experiencing incarceration.

Cary clarified that Taking your Place at the Table usually takes the form of a panel or round table discussion. Within their events, Cary advised the Commissioners to utilize the Task Force status report to help weave the leadership theme. In addition to Taking your Place at the Table events, there was a proposal for some low key, less organized, more informal small-scale meet and greet gatherings out in the community.

Women in Corrections

After a quick synopsis of White Paper (a document describing the problematic conditions for Vermont's incarcerated women after being relocated to the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility), Cary recommended that Commission help reexamine conditions at the facility and for women in corrections in general. Those present were asked to think about what they would like the Commission's role to be within this effort.

An independent group composed of direct service representatives who work in the CRCF and VCW staff is looking at possible alternatives to incarceration (ATI) models. State Representative Suzi Wizowaty is the creator and executive director of a new organization called Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR). This new coalition includes Vermont Works for Women, Mercy Connections, Community Justice Network, Vermont Center for Justice Research, Howard Center, DOC, Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office, Vermont Law School, Human Rights Commission, Criminal Justice Training Council and Migrant Justice. VCJR is still in the process of developing goals and focus. Cary also reported that VCW staff has been keeping track of the Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight committee.

Some of the questions/comments raised by the Commissioners were:

- What is the strip searching yielding? How often is something found? Facts and hard numbers requested.
- Would like to hear what is going on from the perspective of the women who are currently incarcerated, or perhaps those that have been recently released.
- Information! Ask the superintendent why increased security? Has it made a difference? What is that difference in his perspective? Commissioner desire to know where he is coming from in order to know how to navigate change. Recommendations of having him come to the meeting to build this understanding.

- Get a better understanding of best practice and what are existing alternatives, where is success happening.
- Information from probation and parole officers.
- Ask Jill at next meeting what her thoughts are.

Announcements

Sarah Kinney representing the Vermont Network against Domestic and Sexual Violence asked the Commission for support on two pieces of legislature. The first is a firearms storage bill which prohibits individuals subject to domestic violence orders from possessing firearms. The Network, in conjunction with the Vermont Federation of Sportsmen Group, is working with the governor for a solution that would allow sheriffs to charge a fee (paid for by the defendant) to hold these firearms for the duration of the order. There is currently a startup fund dedicated to build a safe facility to secure these firearms. The second piece of legislature discussed protects victims of sexual assault who become pregnant as a result of that assault from their perpetrators gaining custody.

Sarah also reported that an initial report by the Reach Up task force is due out by the 22nd of this month. The universal recommendation made in this report advises a reduction in case loads for workers. Commissioners present asked to be notified when this document is released to the public.

Meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.