

**Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, February 8th, 2017

CAPS Training Center, Schulmaier Hall, 32 College Street, Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland (by phone), Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett, Laine Dunham (by phone), Ruth Finn, Cathy Frey, Nancy LaVarnway, Danielle Martel, Melinda Moulton (by phone), Colin Ryan (by phone), Kerry Secrest

Commissioners absent:

Lynn Batchelor, Jennie Gartner, Susie Hudson

Advisors present:

Robyn Freedner-Maguire of Let's Grow Kids (by phone)
Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office
Auburn Watersong of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Myers, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Myers

Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Welcome/Introductions: Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

Approval of January, 2017 Minutes

MOTION made by Carol, seconded by Ruth:

To approve the minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED

Staff Update

We've had 14 new members sign on to the Equal Pay Compact since our last meeting. We will not have funds next year for Kelly to continue working on this project. We are using the Equal Pay Compact for our results based accountability submission, which will reflect our expectation of fewer signers in FY18 as a result of not having these funds. It would be great to think about creative ways to keep this going next year.

Cary will provide testimony on our budget on Friday in the House Committee on Appropriations.

Our annual Equal Pay Day Event will be on April 4th, not the 11th which is our meeting day. We are thinking about a theme of intersectional feminism, focusing on the gap experienced by women of color, trans women, and other marginalized populations. We are considering a lunch time panel in the State House with the Women's Caucus as partner.

We do still have the Card Room on April 11th, and welcome suggestions about what we could do.

Hannah passed around two info sheets she's drafted about pending VT legislation, including the elimination of sales tax on feminine hygiene products, and accommodations for healthy pregnant workers.

Cary reported on her recent meeting with Gov. Scott's cabinet.

The Norwich University Graduate program has a leadership institute where they put together teams of students and give them leadership challenges to work on. They've asked VCW to participate. We would provide a couple of leadership challenges, and they would brainstorm some solutions. Cary asked for ideas, and those generated included:

- Reaching low-income, disadvantaged women in Vermont
- Expanding statewide presence
- Engaging advisors
- Engaging men and other populations in these issues
- Engaging youth and other people who don't look like us
- What attracts or motivates women to step up to leadership positions, what hinders them?

Other comments included that Commissioners are curious to know how many women participate in this leadership institute, and that a Champions for Change event in Montpelier is a good first step to engage men.

Legislative Lunch Debrief

Marcia led a discussion about our recent Legislative Lunch to receive feedback. Hannah shared the e-survey results collected from event attendees. Feedback included:

- It is unfortunate that the time was so limited.
- Maybe delaying the event until later in the session would help.
- If we are going to ask legislators to participate in a conversation, we need to prime pump for audience engagement.
- Lilly and Hannah discussed the idea of moving the leg lunch to correspond with Equal Pay Day, which would be later in the session, would give the event more focus, and we could expect better weather.
- One survey comment was that we could have the event in Room 11 at the State House, and get more attendance.
- Send other comments, ideas, suggestions to Hannah who will compile them and keep them for the planning Committee next time.
- We've always had this event at the beginning of the session. The goal to educate the legislators that we're here, and the services we provide. We can rethink our goals.
- Perhaps we could have a meet and greet coffee at the beginning of the session, and a larger event in April to meet all of our goals.
- If we have good attendance now we might not want to change the time or venue

Policy Discussion and Vote on Coalition Membership

Cary sent via e-mail a policy document of our historical policy positions, and would like for us to discuss the following three policy issues: Raising the Minimum Wage, Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) Insurance, and Accommodations for Pregnant Workers.

Raising the Minimum Wage

Cary explained that there are two bills pending in the house, both would raise the wage to \$15. One would raise the wage to \$15 by 2020 and the other by 2022, the committee is taking testimony on both together. Cary provided testimony last week on this issue about the disproportionate impact on women, but did bring up the benefit cliff issue identified by the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) in their 2014 report. VCW has been asked to join the “Raise the Wage” Coalition.

Approval of Joining the Raise the Wage Coalition

MOTION made by Melinda, seconded by Laine:

That the Vermont Commission on Women join the Raise the Wage Coalition

MOTION APPROVED

Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance

We are already on the PFML Coalition. A new bill has been introduced, which Cary sent to Commissioners via e-mail, which would create a statewide insurance program that would offer 12 weeks paid leave (per 12-month period) at the individual’s current income up to cap of 2 times the livable wage (as defined by JFO). Benefits are tied to workforce participation, not employer attachment, and would provide job protection for employees who have been at their job for at least a year, as long as it’s not an undue hardship for the employer. The bill covers part-time workers; you have to have paid in for six months out of the preceding 12 months to be eligible for benefits. The Governor has said he will veto the paid family and medical leave bill.

Accommodations for Pregnant Workers

Hannah explained the current status of the law, and the gap in protections for pregnant workers experiencing a normal, healthy pregnancy, who are not entitled to accommodations such as carrying a water bottle, having a stool to sit at the cash register, or additional or longer breaks. Commissioner comments on the topic included:

- What are the employer concerns? How do we help from the education side?
- Last year, there was a lot of confusion about why we need this. One employer said that she has a hard time finding good employees, and this would provide another way for employees to take advantage of her.
- We need some good education that shows the humanity of this issue. Is there support or a coalition formed?
- One of our roles is to uncover the things that are unseen, this is one of these issues.
- We could do some education about existing rights.
- We should link with VT’s Department of Labor. They create mandatory posters about worker rights. These help workers know more, and employers are reminded of their obligations.
- If Cary testifies, she should include the history of discrimination against women as child bearers, such as discrimination against women in factories. VCW should research and bring this up.
- Having supports for people at their jobs gives them the ability to stay employed.

Committee Reports

Outreach Committee (Chair undesignated, staffed by Lilly and Hannah):

Melinda gave an update on the Outreach Committee's meeting. Colin will present next month about how to support the Commission and staff on social media in getting the word out. Commissioners can amplify the message. Carol suggested Commissioners engage with the Commission on social media. Lilly asked Commissioners to send her and Hannah things they find that might be appropriate to share. Marcia follows AAUW, Equal Rights Amendment page. Melinda follows the Peace and Justice Group in Burlington, Rights and Democracy VT, and PPNNE. Kerry recommended Bridget Schulte's book, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*. Auburn mentioned that Commissioners can follow the VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, whose branding will be changing soon. Robyn mentioned that Commissioners can also follow Let's Grow Kids, they post a lot of timely information on Early Childhood Issues, and that marketing research has demonstrated that for younger women, Facebook is the primary source of news.

Health, Safety, Civil and Legal Rights Committee (Chaired by Carol, staffed by Lilly):

Carol reported that her Committee spoke about Planned Parenthood Funding, and federal threats to reproductive rights. Funding is in the recommended budget, but the concern is trimming in committees. They also discussed VT's response to threats of changed to the Affordable Care Act, and requested additional information from Kevin Veller regarding the health care All Payer Model. They will focus on health care for refugee women and pregnancy accommodations. Melinda offered that there is also a new bill that would provide safe places for people who are addicted.

Education and Human Development Committee (Chaired by Danielle (interim), staffed by Hannah):

Danielle reported that her Committee hadn't met yet but that she was working on scheduling. Nancy offered thanks to Danielle who stepped in as acting chair, she really appreciates that, as does Marcia. Robyn mentioned that people are thinking seriously in VT about children being served in public schools earlier, but one of the things that it is important for child outcomes is mixed delivery system, that meet the needs of individual children. Different environments can be better for the development of younger children.

Economic Equity and Security (Chaired by Melinda, staffed by Cary):

Melinda reported that her committee is meeting Thursday, February 9th. She believes it will be helpful to review pending legislation and to provide recommendations to the Commissioners. She also recommends that all three Committees get together a few times a year. Tomorrow the meeting will focus on reviewing the priority areas, defining a focus for 2017, and hearing from Committee members on the most important issues for VT women, and how best the Committee can assist the Commission.

Marcia expects updates from the Committees next month.

Announcements

Eileen announced that Washington D.C. finalized a Paid Family and Medical Leave bill which she will send to Cary. Also, she will send link to the Molly Stark School in Bennington that offers a full-service educational opportunity.

Melinda announced that the Women's March Group had a meeting last weekend, they are moving on and keeping this alive. If anyone wants to be involved, let Melinda know. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England has a retreat this upcoming weekend where they will be thinking about how to protect women's rights and to continue to provide quality care to women.

Meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.