

**Vermont Commission on Women  
Meeting Minutes**

November 18, 2015

Pavilion Office Building, 3rd floor conference room, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT

**Commissioners present:**

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

**Commissioners absent:**

Lynn Batchelor

**Advisors present:**

Becky Raymond of Building Bright Futures  
Marilyn Grunwald of Business and Professional Women  
Anne Gallivan of Evolve Rutland  
Kim Swartz of Maternal & Child Health Division, Vermont Department of Health  
Mary Rockwell Thon and Michelle Beam of the Girl Scouts Of Green and White Mountains  
Anne Burmeister & intern Rachael of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England  
Kevin Veller of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office  
Diane Derby of U.S. Senator Leahy's Office  
Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office  
Karen Moran Lafayette of Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council  
Auburn Watersong of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence  
Christine Ryan of the Vermont State Nurses' Association  
Catherine Welch of Vermont Women In Higher Education  
Kaitlyn Armstrong of Vermont Women In Law Enforcement  
Marybeth Redmond of Vermont Works for Women  
Annie Accettella of Voices for Vermont's Children  
Laura Lind-Blum of Women Business Owners' Network

**Guests:** Matt Levin, Vermont Early Childhood Alliance

**Staff:** Cary Brown, Hannah Elle Myers, Lilly Talbert

**Presiding:** Marcia Merrill

**Recording:** Hannah Elle Myers

**Meeting called to order at 9:38 a.m.**

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

**Approval of October 2015 minutes**

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Melinda Moulton

**MOTION APPROVED**

**Staff/event updates:**

Welcomed Reappointed Commissioner Cathy Frey and our new Executive Staff Assistant, Hannah Elle Myers.

Equal Pay Compact: Colin, Cary, Kerry and Marcia will gather after the meeting to discuss, all are welcome to gather.

Change the Story has a steering committee meeting this afternoon. Over the next six weeks they will be looking at how to utilize the data collected so far as part of the research project on women's economic well-being, and are planning a strategy and timeline for its release.

Melinda Mouton, Cary Brown and Karen Lafayette serve on the Governor's Council on Pathways from Poverty which issued a report last week, which had some legislative focus. Copies were distributed.

VCW is working on the US DOL grant on Paid Family Leave feasibility study, and Cary will have more updates as they are available.

The recent 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Vermont Vision for a Multicultural Future Conference has some commissioners thinking about the composition of the Commission, and whether the Commission should consider presenting the current makeup of the Commission to the appointing authorities before future appointments are made.

Carol Buchdahl led the division of Advisors into groups by categories, and asked them to discuss their legislative agendas for the upcoming legislative session and to identify commonalities. Commissioners joined these small group discussions. The groups worked independently for 20 minutes, and then came back to present to the group at large.

Group 1 was composed of Matt Levin of the Vermont Early Childhood Alliance, Annie Accettella (on behalf of Michelle Fey) from Voices for Vermont's Children, and Becky Raymond from Building Bright Futures.

Matt Levin from Vermont Early Childhood Alliance presented his group's top 10 legislative priorities for 2016:

1. Childcare Financial Assistance Programs – CCFAP, which provides assistance to low-income families
  - a. Underfunded based on federal guidelines and day to day experiences of providers
2. Zap the Gap – VT Afterschool Inc., learning gap when kids don't have access to good afterschool and summer programming. Kids who have access to resources have an upward trend, kids without programming over the summer stop improvement or decrease improvement, and over time, creates significant performance gap
3. State Budget - should be based on need not revenue

4. Paid Sick Days
5. Affordable Housing – Vermont Housing & Conservation Board gets full funding (hinges on funding), Affordable Housing Coalition
6. Agency of Human Services – IT Database. Built in 1980's, this request is led by Hunger Free VT, they want people to be able to sign up for other things when they sign up for 3 Squares, such as affordable housing, etc., to help ensure families get the services they need.
7. Building Bright Futures Car License Plate Program – Capital development for home based childcare providers, provides low/no interest loan program. They need to freshen up the plates to increase sales, which requires legislative action.
8. Insurance for Home Based Childcare Providers – home based providers are losing home owner's insurance
9. Child Protection – clean up S9, focused on admin, and working with those focused on policy
10. Delivery of Special Education Services across school district lines. Tiny administrative issue is causing a lot of challenges ensuring children receive the special education services they need across school district lines.

Annie Accettella, campaign manager for Voices for Vermont's Children reported on the following legislative priorities:

1. Expand Dental Therapist program, which is similar to a nurse practitioner, allowing opportunities to provide care for Medicaid/elderly, low income patients, in connection with the Oral Health Coalition.

Group 2 was composed of Kim Swartz of the Maternal & Child Health Division of the VT Department of Health, Vermont Department of Health, Auburn Watersong of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Anne Burmeister and intern Rachael of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and Christine Ryan of the Vermont State Nurses' Association

Christine Ryan presented the group's identified legislative issues:

1. LARC (Access, Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives) education and preventions (IUD's and implants)
2. Collaboration Family Planning for Incarcerated Women
3. Access to safe and affordable housing (victims/survivors/incarcerated women)
4. Access to addiction recovery and family planning (transportation/childcare)
5. Develop Nurse Practitioner Prescription Authority (opioid crisis)
6. Paid Sick & Safe Days
7. Dental Therapist options – providers/access
8. Safe Staffing of RNs – operating Room Circulating RN
9. Contraceptive Equality Act -
10. BSN in 10-2022/Title 8 Work Force Development
11. Home Health – RN/NPs – would like NPs to sign orders

## 12. Access for Veteran Care

Anne Burmeister of PPNNE offered that Training & Reimbursement changes in LARC delivery model could be baby step in movement to have value based payment vs. fee for service. Anne offered that the Colorado LARC Project increased value based reimbursement for providers, and unplanned pregnancy & abortion rate dropped in teens by 40%.

1. Birth Control Bill which has three prongs:
  - a. Codify the birth control benefit in Affordable Care Act (ACA) in Vermont
    - i. The ACA requires that there are no copays or deductibles for birth control. However, there is a lot of confusion resulting in unintended consequences for women; the federal government issued guidelines, which are the backbone of the legislation, but they are not the law.
  - b. Extending the birth control mandate to include vasectomies.
  - c. Change to one year of birth control prescription instead of an office visit required every 3 months. Currently, insurers can require that women have an office visit every three months for prescription renewal, which can be a barrier to access for women in rural areas.

Auburn Watersong highlighted that access to birth control and family planning for incarcerated women is limited and that's concerning. She presented some of the 2016 legislative priorities for the Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence; the focus is on economic justice this year.

1. Preserve and promote funding for victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence and the Network's member programs.
2. Poverty and Economic Justice – Several bills drafted now include \$2 per night hotel fee to support affordable housing, the Network supports this
3. Increasing Revenue – The Network refuses to accept not discussing increasing revenue any longer
4. Batterer intervention programming in desperate need of support
5. Clarify language about sexual assault and stalking
6. Body cameras on police
7. Restraining Orders – Presently up to victim to enforce, compliance rests entirely with victim, the Network is interested in pursuing other models to enforce compliance.

Group 3 was composed of Karen Moran Lafayette of Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council, Anne Gallivan of Evolve Rutland, Laura Lind-Blum of the Women Business Owners Network, and Marybeth Redmond of Vermont Works for Women.

Karen Lafayette of Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council presented their legislative priorities:

1. Maintaining a safety net – stabilizing families, helping them take advantage of job and education opportunities

- a. Economic security – Reach up, housing assistance, food security, heating assistance, fully fund crisis fuel needs, health care, increase Reach-Up grant, increase low-income weatherization program, (dropped from 1300 households to 700 households, and loss of 30-40 jobs)
  - b. Working closely with Voices for Vermont’s Children about dental therapist program to provide access for low income people, citing the aging population increasing need, promoting a model that would accept Medicaid patients
  - c. Solutions to the Medicaid gap
2. After stabilizing, enabling economic opportunity, funding programs offering money for micro loans, savings programs, funding credit repair and financial literacy programs for people, promoting access to banking & saving, etc. Governor’s Financial Literacy Commission is trying to put financial literacy programming into schools and educational programs
  3. Increasing financial assistance benefits, transportation and child care are the largest barriers for Vermonters returning to work
  4. Monitor implementation of Pre-K program
  5. Paid Sick Days
  6. Reducing benefit cliffs
  7. Expand Earned Income Tax Credit
  8. Improve workforce training programs
  9. Large scale transportation study

Anne Gallivan of Evolve Rutland reports being a new organization, they are working with women, inspiring them to become strong professional and political leaders, and advocate for an increased presence of women at all levels in Rutland, such as in business, leadership, political, and entrepreneurship.

Laura Lind-Blum of the Women Business Owners Network reported their legislative priorities:

1. Supporting women to overcome barriers to starting businesses
2. Discovering what issues that are affecting women business owners as the data is difficult to access in a meaningful way.
  - a. WBON anticipates barriers will be:
    - i. Commercial lending barriers, and ensuring that process is not gender biased,
    - ii. Questions about contracting for state government

Marybeth Redmond of Vermont Works for Women reports supporting Paid Sick Leave as a priority, and offered to allow other organizations to utilize their well-developed social media platform.

Marilyn Grunwald of Business and Professional Women called into the meeting, and reported via e-mail after the meeting that their legislative priorities are:

1. Equal Pay

2. Health concerns for women
3. Civil rights

Group 4 was composed of Catherine Welch of Vermont Women In Higher Education, Mary Rockwell Thon and Michelle Beam of the Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains, and Kaitlyn Armstrong of Vermont Women In Law Enforcement.

1. Catherine Welch of Vermont Women in Higher Education presented the group's common priorities:
  - a. Paid Leave
  - b. Mentoring
  - c. Empowerment
  - d. Advocacy
  - e. Bringing women into male dominated fields, e.g. STEM, and law enforcement

Kaitlyn Armstrong of Vermont Women in Law Enforcement also notes that Vermont Women in Higher Education has a strong board, and a spring annual conference in Killington, empowering women into higher education. She reports having no legislative agenda, but is in a unique position to be part of the advisory committee. As professionals they frequently work with low-income households and deal with incarceration, and may offer a unique perspective. They will be sponsoring an award at the Vermont Police Academy, for highest physical fitness level. The organization is focused on recruiting and retaining strong women in law enforcement, and will be sponsoring several Girls on the Run this year.

Mary Rockwell Thon and Michelle Beam of the Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains report that the Girl Scouts don't have a legislative agenda, but support 10,000 girls and 4500 adults in the council, half of which are in Vermont, that they are adding STEAM programs, and focusing on ZAP the GAP. They also offer the five-month program, Girls Rock the Capitol, where girls of Vermont partner with different legislators and get great exposure to the political process and different legislators.

Diane Derby of Senator Leahy's office added that they are concerned about health care, as well as Department for Children and Families and foster care issues, as the number of children in foster care rises, along with the number of mothers with addiction, and notes that there is list of people waiting for treatment which is time sensitive and should be a priority.

**Meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.**