

**Vermont Commission on Women  
Meeting Minutes - UNAPPROVED**

September 9, 2015

Pavilion Office Building, 4th floor conference room  
109 State Street, Montpelier VT

**Commissioners present:**

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett, Laine Dunham, Ruth Finn, Susie Hudson, Nancy LaVarney, Danielle Martel, Melinda Moulton, Colin Ryan, Kerry Secrest

**Commissioners absent:**

Lynn Batchelor, Eileen Boland, Jennie Gartner

**Staff:** Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert

**Presiding:** Marcia Merrill

**Recording:** Lilly Talbert

**Advisors:** Becky Raymond representing Building Bright Futures, Katarina Lisaius representing U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, Rachel Jolly and Marybeth Redmond of Vermont Works for Women, Diane Derby representing U.S. Senator Leahy's Office, Anne Burmeister representing Planned Parenthood of Northern New England

**Guests:** Rep. Mary Hooper of Montpelier, Karen Dolan of Vermont Works for Women, Tiffany Blumele of Change the Story VT

**Meeting called to order at 9:36 a.m.**

**Welcome/Introductions**

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked those present to introduce themselves and speak about how they came to be involved in VCW. Marcia congratulated reappointed Commissioners Susie Hudson, Carol Buchdahl and Ruth Finn, and welcomed new Commissioner Colin Ryan.

**Approval of June 2015 minutes**

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Melinda Moulton

**MOTION APPROVED**

**Child Protection Discussion**

Discussion: Marcia led a discussion on the question of whether VCW has a role in this issue and should we pursue this topic.

Outcome: Commissioners requested a panel discussion on this topic be added to a meeting agenda as soon as possible between now and January.

**Change the Story VT Update**

Tiffany Bluemle, Director of Change the Story VT, provided an update on the partnership's work in two major areas: the data collection project and workforce diversity.

Dashboard: The “dashboard” project is a research and data collection project identifying measures of women’s economic well-being. This is a baseline set of indicators, providing an accurate and more nuanced picture of women’s economic well-being in Vermont.

Workforce Diversity: Change the Story VT proposes to build greater awareness using the economic case for increasing the numbers of women in STEM and leadership positions. They are working on developing a cadre of employer champions to engage various sectors, develop understanding of value of including women in training, in academic settings, and in recruitment, hiring and promotion.

### **Staff Updates**

Lilly reviewed the following projects: new events calendar at vtwomen.org; new information and referral access database; women's equality day 2015 press conference, series of paid family and medical leave forums around the state, the Vermont Equal Pay Compact, the Cheryl Hanna Legal Rights of Women in Vermont internship, gubernatorial candidate forum next September.

Cary reviewed the following projects: Executive Staff Asst. now posted, Federal DOL paid family and medical leave feasibility study grant application, Start Smart salary negotiation trainings in partnership with Norwich Career and Internship Center, Women’s Economic Security Summit October.

### **Incarcerated Women Updates**

Rep. Mary Hooper thanked the VCW for our focus on women in corrections. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, she is involved with the budgets of DOC, the judiciary, victim advocacy, and Buildings and General Services. She also serves on the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee, which has met twice so far this year. Nothing directly relating to women and families has been discussed in any depth yet. Discussion has included the idea of a centralized facility, mental health related services in facilities. The committee recently heard that 80% of incarcerated women have mental illness diagnosis, while only 40% of men do. Mary would like to close the women’s facility, reducing the number of people incarcerated because we’re not resolving underlying problems. Funding would need to go to mental health and other supports, not just probation and parole. Carol asked about other state’s models...Texas has completed lots of research, driven by expense. Vermont is ripe for change w/women – such a small population – a good experiment.

Karen Dolan, CRCF Program Manager at Vermont Works for Women agrees on prevention side. CRCF continues to be “mixed facility” with all kinds of offenders together in one space, unlike the male facilities. The current population is at 173 which is high enough to require the use of “sleigh beds” – a container on the floor with a mattress. The current superintendent produces a dashboard of stats on indicators such as use of force and results of random drug tests. There is now a handbook available for all inmates, and one for staff. VCI left in January – no more sewing shop. There are new BGS maintenance staff that are addressing and fixing facility issues. There is a new medical contract this year. Access to outside – new recreational coordinator, better access. Population includes 60-70 detainees, and 50-60 inmates held past their minimum sentence due to obstacles such as lack of housing. Work crew opportunities - approximately 25 women are eligible, with 8 – 10 that are “medically cleared” to leave facility. More opportunities for projects for the work crew are needed.

Rachel Jolly, Director of Women's Programs at Vermont Works for Women provided an update on VWW's contract for services in the facility.

### **Announcements**

Becky Raymond of Building Bright Futures distributed a report entitled, How Are VT's Young Children and Families? For more information, contact Becky at [braymond@buildingbrightfutures.org](mailto:braymond@buildingbrightfutures.org).

Katarina Lisaius spoke about a federal prison reform bill that Senator Sanders will introduce soon, eliminating for-profit prisons. D.C. staffer [Lori Kearns@sanders@senate.gov](mailto:Lori_Kearns@sanders@senate.gov) requests our input on a bill re: mental health and drug treatment in prison.

Step Up to Skilled Manufacturing class – partnering w/employers in Chittenden County in November seeking participants. Math skills – 8<sup>th</sup> grade level and mechanical aptitude required. Participants must be 18 or over, have transportation, child care, and housing, and able to work standing on feet.

**Meeting adjourned at 12:28 p.m.**