

**Vermont Commission on Women
Criminal Legal System Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 24, 2022, | 9:00 – 10:30 am
Teleconference**

Commissioners present: Ashley Messier (co-chair), Lisa Ryan (co-chair) Lisa Senecal, Sarah Mell

Commissioners absent: Delaney Courcelle, Kerin Durfee

Advisors present: Jessica Barquist of Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Alison Lamagna of Vermont Works for Women, and Meredith Roberts of ANA Vermont

Staff present: Cary Brown, Ellie Lane, Lilly Talbert

Recording: Lilly Talbert, Sarah Mell

Presiding: Ashley Messier, Lisa Ryan

Meeting called to order at 9:05 am

Welcome & Introductions

Lisa Ryan led personal introductions focused on committee members describing restorative moments from this past weekend. The committee welcomed new member, Alison Lamagna, Vermont Works for Women's Director of Programs & Gender Equity Services.

Agenda Addendum

The committee agreed to add the following agenda items to the meeting:

Ashley proposed writing a letter to House Judiciary on [H.399](#), an act relating to incarceration terms for criminal defendants who are primary caretakers of dependent children. The letter would address the impact of incarceration on women and would request the committee take up the bill.

Cary proposed the committee offer suggestions for interview questions for the new DOC Director of Women's Services.

Continuation of group discussion: CRCF replacement process

The committee reviewed the compiled document [Top Three Things to Learn | Criminal Legal System Committee](#) and identified overall themes in these questions, including:

- (New Facility) Is a new facility necessary? If so, why?
- (Alternatives to incarceration) What are the opportunities for alternative options to incarceration in this process?
- (Services) What services were missing that folks needed to have kept them from experiencing incarceration, what services were needed during incarceration, and what services would have helped support life after incarceration?

Expressing concern for both providers and our incarcerated community, the committee discussed health care provision for folks experiencing incarceration, upon entering, while living in the facility, and when they transition out. Ashley described procedures, medical equipment, and staffing issues and offered to share information about VitalCore, the contractor for health services, VitalCore.

Identifying Next Steps

The committee discussed event planning logistics. Plans include:

Virtual regional forums around the state with panel discussions

- Potential panelists: formerly incarcerated folks, Ashley, Jessica, Cary; regional reps from DOC, DIVAS and service providers
- Potential panel facilitators - Sarah Mell for Northwest region – Delaney, Lisa Senecal for Northeast; Lisa Ryan can take Southwest Region

Audience: As broad as possible

- Invite House and Senate reps in committees of jurisdiction, as they are the decision-makers.
- Important for outreach to be broad to make sure we have an intersected audience at each of these regional sessions
- Present and former Commissioners from the region
- Community partners and aligned organizations, Advisors
- Formerly incarcerated folks, and for those participating with lived experience, we must make sure they are protected and have ways of making their questions/comments anonymous and heard with their privacy respected. Ashley reported that via Zoom it's easy to offer private question asking. It's important to also have people at these events who can directly provide support to them, should it be needed.

The event dates should not conflict with holidays, school/college breaks, or events in that region.

The committee will work together to create a podcast to serve as introductory information, as a vehicle for promotion, and to fill folks in before the conversation. It could run in the meeting stream as a lead-up to each actual event. Lilly reported that once recording is complete, depending on how much editing is needed, the finished product would be likely to take at least two full days to prepare.

Along with editing and posting the podcast, VCW will promote the event through all channels, including newsletter, social media, the press, all partners, and via targeted email invitations.

Committee members expressed curiosity about the pulse of each community and how much they know about the facility replacement issue; what they know about services and how the programs serving folks in their communities work; and what more could be done with funding those programs. Lisa Ryan thought the events would be an opportunity to educate the community about the new prison discussion, ask questions we have, and educate communities about holistic and restorative practices.

Approval of January 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Lisa Ryan, seconded by Ashley:
To approve the [January 7, 2022 minutes](#) as submitted.
Hearing no nays, the motion unanimously passed.

Proposed Letter re: H. 399

Ashley provided background information on [H.399](#). She co-drafted it with Sarah Coffey and members of the Women's Caucus. This bill proposes to require the sentencing court to consider the criminal defendant's status as the primary caretaker of a dependent child before imposing a sentence. If alternatives are not suitable for whatever reason, the court will have to justify that decision and then take into consideration both the length and location of incarceration. State's attorneys want this provision. There is nothing in law saying judges need to consider this currently.

This bill is about children and focuses on ACES (adverse childhood experiences), the impact of primary caretaker incarceration on children, and the impact on those who then care for children while their caretaker is incarcerated. 6000 kids experience parental incarceration every year in VT, similar to the figure for babies born in our state. Kids are ready to testify. Cary expressed support for this project.

MOTION made by Ashley Messier, seconded by Lisa Ryan:
To draft and send a letter in support of House Judiciary taking up H.399

Hearing no nays, the motion unanimously passed.

Cary and Ashley will work together on a draft for committee review.

Interview Questions

Cary is on the interview committee with Bill Soule, Kim Bushey, Theresa Messier and Tina Waldrom, for the new DOC Director of Women's Services position, and was asked to suggest some questions for the candidates. The committee asked a few clarifying questions and provided many suggestions. Lisa Ryan thanked Cary for serving in this role.

Meeting Closure

Meeting adjourned at 10:28 am

The next committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 7, 2022, from 9:00 – 10:30 a.m.