

State of Vermont**Vermont Commission on Women**

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Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes**Friday, December 15, 2023 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.****ONLINE ONLY**

Commissioners present: Esther Charlestin (co-chair), and Sarah Mell (co-chair), Hazel Brewster, Brenda Churchill, Nancy Kaplan, Wendy Knight, Sophia Rabe, Kelly-Rue Riso, Linda Joy Sullivan, Susan Sussman.

Commissioners absent: Heather Bouchey, Kellie Campbell, Alex Hilliard, Annie Mackin, Ashley Messier.

Advisors present: Katie Salina, Let's Grow Kids, and Kara Casey, VT Network.

Staff: Cary Brown and Karen Cygnarowicz

Presiding: Esther Charlestin and Sarah Mell

Recording: Karen Cygnarowicz

1. Meeting called to order

Meeting called to order at: 10:06 a.m.

2. Approval of agenda

MOTION made by Wendy, seconded by Nancy.

To approve the proposed amended meeting agenda, giving discretion to the chair to deviate from the agenda as necessary.

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

Sarah and Esther welcomed everyone and asked them to share their “rose, bud, and/or thorn” of the day. Cary welcomed new commissioners.

3. Review Group Agreements**4. Approval of November 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

MOTION made by Brenda, seconded by Hazel.

To approve the November 2023 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes adopted.

5. Legislative Agenda and Priorities for 2024

Cary presented the legislative tracking document, available on the VCW website:

- [VCW legislative tracking 2023-2024 - Google Sheets](#)

Katie Salina, of Let's Grow Kids, spoke on the 2023 childcare bill. Working to “get the money into the hands of those who need it most” with a focus on early childhood education programs.

- Question asked if they have created specific bills to move this work forward.
- Increase in childcare provider pay? Readiness programs and increase reimbursement rate to increase educator pay.
- What can the commission do to be supportive of that work? Katie asked to keep ears to ground around the state, any feedback of what is or is not working. Offered contact information.

Cary shared comments made by VCW partner Vermont Works for Women:

- Equity in infrastructure, the history of VWW and their strategies
- Career and technical education pathways and funding
- There have been clear requirements for federal funding
 - o Access to data collection and reporting and hold the tech centers accountable
 - o Continuity of services for justice-involved women
 - Working with justice-involved women
 - In need of all support: re-entry, housing, treatment
 - What are the appropriate services?
- Susan mentioned the work of re-entry and planning meetings taking place. Cary responded to clarify that the DOC has been hosting meetings.

Kara Casey, of VT Network, shared their legislative priorities.

- Economic justice and housing related work
- Continual focus on paid leave and housing
- Women's correctional facility
- Addressing issues around human trafficking
- question asked if Kara could speak to sexual violence on college campuses. Kara shared that they received federal funding for creating a center, restorative justice in the national landscape.
- question asked about emergency housing? Kara did not specify housing for domestic violence emergency situations, but general support for survivors. Survivors need more housing options, more affordable housing, and need subsidies. "How do we insure what programs come next are trauma informed, and create safe spaces?"
- Need support from VCW? Will need support in real time.
- VTNetwork will focus on Paid Leave, and to include Safe Leave in the bill.
- More available on their website:
<https://www.vtnetwork.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/12/2024-LEGISLATIVE-AGENDA.pdf>

Kara gave an update on Policy Hire with Jessica Barquist's departure, planning to hire mid-session.

Cary shared update from Voices for Vermont's Children (slideshow):

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yUfy9pxZbaCb6UAHTPLfGOQ9IEbnWsr/view>
- Focus on child safety, creating basic needs estimate and remain current, state funding
- Including youth voice in the process, as Vermont is 1 of 3 states that does not include youth voice.

Cary shared upcoming issues for VCW:

- Paid Leave (top issue, bill passed in house with a lot of support, now in senate) – we are part of a broad coalition, Voices from VT's children, alzheimers association, healthcare, early childhood, etc. We'll know more in January: what is the path forward?
- To focus on the Severe or Pervasive Standard / harassment within education, for students.
- Women in corrections, building a new facility is on going.
- Health Equity, free-standing birthing centers? ([H180](#))
- Changing medicare requirements to be more equitable ([H118](#))
 - o Women making less, less in medicare, ss, retirement.
 - o We've been asked to join the coalition.

Question asked if there is any legislative interest in gender in sports.

- Brenda has been tracking positive and negative press and conversations. "It does identify who is not friendly to the community."

- Versus sponsorship across many states, pass along various legislation, and to poke public opinion.

6. Committee Updates

Updates from the Health Equity Committee:

- The committee met with Emma Anderson, a student at St. Michaels College and director of the nonprofit, Not a Luxury, inc. (<https://www.notaluxuryinc.org/>) with focus on getting menstrual products in all schools. There's no strategy of how this is implemented, and there is no feedback mechanism. Nancy responded with the suggestion that this is a rural health communications project: to reach out, to record how this is being provisioned and to put pressure on how regions can come into compliance.
- Nancy also shared an update on Free Standing Birthing Centers.
 - o What ifs?
 - o If we were going to take a stand on this, we would need to take a vote.
 - o Unintended consequences of the issue, Hazel affirms there will need to be many more conversations.
 - o Sarah asked to invite free standing birthing center presentation to the full commission.

Updates from the Housing & Caregiving Committee:

- Paid family leave.
- Housing for domestic violence survivors.
- Focus on service, how can we support? Suggests Habitat for Humanity, single moms that may need help, visiting nursing homes.

Updates from the Workplace Equity & Security Committee:

- Equal pay compact, interest in reviving the work.

7. Staff, commissioner, advisor updates

In Ellie's absence, Cary is taking on Ellie's responsibilities and open to any feedback from commissioners.

8. Public Forum, 12:01pm.

Guests: Alexandra Bambery, Eve Lapre, Beth Buckman, and Wendy Rice.

Sarah asked what is working for us as the Commission and also the public.

Esther had invited Beth Buckman of Addison County, Habitat for Humanity envisioning affordable housing.

- Habitat for Humanity has 6 or 7 chapters in Vermont, all over the state, meet with all twice a year at state level.
- Share that it is expensive.
- Beth also works with residential lending as a banker.
- Only builds one house a year.
- Addison chapter works with Middlebury College, students design.
- Supports individuals to file tax appropriate, and follows up with town clerks.
- Multi-family unit, apartment style? H4H is not a landlord.
- Sarah mentioned Champlain Valley partnered with H4H as landlords?
- Downstreet Housing working with Montpelier Group? David Mullen?
- Receive grants from VHCB
- If not for volunteer labor or selling material at cost.
- Northern Timbers volunteer their labor
- Local discounts on materials, solar grants may have dried up

- Efficiency
- 0% interest rate on mortgage
- How can VCW help? Recruitment or service days?
 - o Fundraising
 - o Grants/accessing to funds
 - o State or federal grants? Beth thinks state.
 - o [VLITE - Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity](#)
 - o [Efficiency Vermont](#)

Eve Lapre of Rutland, CGC

- Re-entry
- No housing... people are stuck in correctional facility without housing in place
- Sober living is full
- Made connections between Habitat for Humanity and Eve's work?

Beth suggests: Neighbor Works of Western Vermont, Rutland, counseling classes, Downstreet in Montpelier (networked throughout the state).

Eve asked who we (VCW) are?

- Esther started.
- Beth asks for ways to collaborate, start an email thread, ways to connect. Esther offered committee invite.
- Sarah continued "who we are"?

Eve asked for trauma informed training of police officers.

- Shared a story of a woman who was confronted by 4 male police officers, and charged.
- Understaffed law enforcement, new recruitment, only a 2-week training.
- Linda spoke on her training police force and judges. Training must include judiciary.
- Others suggest the resources of New Story Center in Rutland and Project Vision in Rutland.
- Ad-hoc committees, education in training committee.
- How can we advocate for the standards that better serve those most impacted by gender, race, etc. bias?

Another guest, Wendy Rice of Let's Grow Kids joins.

- Cary introduced her, when they worked together at Vermont Works for Women, Change The Story.
- Let's Grow Kids, outreach, strategic partnerships.
- Paying attention to the rollout of the childcare bill, keep momentum going, collecting stories going.
- Affects our families, affects the state's economic development.
- So: political pressure, storytelling & listening.

Meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.
