
State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
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Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

Friday, March 15, 2024 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

ONLINE ONLY

Commissioners present: Co-Chair Esther Charlestin, Co-Chair Sarah Mell, Heather Bouchey, Hazel Brewster, Kellie Campbell, Nancy Kaplan, Ashley Messier, Kelly-Rue Riso, Linda Joy Sullivan, and Susan Sussman

Commissioners absent: Brenda Churchill, Alex Hilliard, Wendy Knight, Annie Mackin, Sophia Rabe

Advisors present: Logan Snow of PPNNE, Kara Casey of VT Network, Margaret Overman of Vermont Works for Women, Betsy Hassan of ANA-Vermont

Staff: Cary Brown, Karen Cygnarowicz, and Ellie Lane

Presiding: Co-Chairs Esther Charlestin and Sarah Mell

Recording: Ellie Lane

1. Meeting called to order

Meeting called to order at: **9:34 a.m.**

Icebreaker: What do you keep returning to in your life?

- Political service
- Meditation
- Organizing
- Family
- Art/creative
- School
- Advocacy
- The ocean
- Friends
- The woods
- House projects

2. Approval of agenda

MOTION made by Kellie, seconded by Hazel.

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

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

3. Review Group Agreements

4. Approval of February 16, 2024 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Kelly-Rue, seconded by Heather
To approve the February 2024 minutes as submitted.
Heather abstained.

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes adopted.

5. Committee Updates

Workplace Equity Committee

Kellie updated about the Equal Pay Day campaign. Kellie made a new video to promote equal pay day and asked folks to share that. We have a series of more coming, a press release and our historical podcasts.

Cary talked briefly about the VT Equal Pay Compact.

Health Equity Committee

Hazel shared that at the last subcommittee meeting the group talked about policy statements and discussed updating them.

Nancy shared that in her job at UVM she mentors students and sponsors a project for medical students and has been working on a project about menstrual products in school restrooms. They will start a deep dive on this project in September. There is some legislation being worked on currently to update the language to expand the requirement that schools provide the products in all restrooms rather than most.

The group also discussed top health priorities, and climate crisis, reproductive justice, aging with dignity, came up in addition to others. The other topic touched on was the freestanding birth center conversation. They feel it would be important to be clear about our position on this to support Cary's work.

Betsy shared that ANA-Vermont comes to this conversation from a health-system perspective and is concerned about the lack of the Certificate of Need (CON) process, and allows for birth centers to operate outside out of the review of the Green Mountain Care Board. This would allow diversion of resources away from hospitals which could lead hospitals to close their birthing centers. Birthing centers would not be subject to laws requiring them not to turn away laboring women. Under the bill, the rules and standards would be set by a trade association. There is concern about the global impact to the rest of the health care system.

Cary asked about freestanding surgical centers and the comparison there. Betsy said that they are subject to the CON process but also that there is a difference in volume. Surgical centers are in response to growing demand, where our birth rates are decreasing. In Chittenden County, it would be okay, but in more rural areas it would be problematic.

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Some additional perspectives shared in the group included:

- a personal story of using a freestanding birth center and how it impacted her
- the feeling of safety in hospitals
- experience as a black woman and not feeling safe in hospitals
- thoughts about trauma-informed care for survivors of sexual trauma

Planned Parenthood is supportive of the freestanding birth centers from a bodily autonomy and choice perspective.

The Committee is going to work on pulling together notes about our questions and concerns.

Housing and caregiving

Cary updated the group about the Housing and Caregiving Committee. They have discussed housing for Vermont elders and supporting aging in place programs. They also discussed wanting to have a service component for Commissioners. Esther has reached out to Habitat for Humanity to help in a tangible way and will share dates that folks could help. The group also talked about paid leave. Their next meeting is April 3rd at 1:00 pm.

Kellie brought up her conversation with NEK housing stakeholders and invited Cary and other Commissioners to join future conversations. April 11 at 11 is the next meeting.

The Housing and Homelessness Alliance has a list of local groups doing this work around the state. Kara shared she is on their board, and also lives in the NEK would love to connect about this.

6. Legislative and operational updates

Cary shared legislative updates. Paid Leave is not happening this year. In the meantime, the legislature is looking at changing the (unpaid) Vermont Family and Parental Leave act.

We've been following a salary transparency bill, H.704 and Cary offered testimony on this bill which would require employers to post a salary range in job advertisements. The Committee is working on an amendment that would include a good faith requirement.

Proposal 4, a constitutional amendment that is an equal rights amendment that would prohibit discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or national origin. It looks like it's moving along but wouldn't go to the voters until 2026 at the earliest.

Karen announced that she is resigning from VCW, effective March 21.

Cary talked about the hiring process and asked for Commissioners support in that, Kellie and Susan indicated they may be able to help.

Sarah announced the show they will be in, opening soon, called [Breakfalls](#).

7. Planning for April public forum in Bennington

We will be meeting in Bennington at the Vermont Department of Health. Do people have suggestions about who we could reach out to?

Logan Snow lives in Bennington and would be happy to help.

- NOW
- AAUW
- PAVE
- Bennington Museum
- Arts community
- Bennington College
- Youth Harm Reduction org, ACT – [Alliance for Community Translations](#)
 - Period-Positive workplaces
 - Period-packing parties
- Margarite Adelman at LWVVT
- Chamber of Commerce
- Midwifery's/Hospital/OBGYN
- Have Justice Will Travel
- Agency of Human Services for suggestions – Heather Bouchey will reach out and let Cary know what she learns.
- Local LGBTQIA
- Child care center
- Schools
- Refugee supports

Karen is working on promotional materials and will be sharing those resources next week.

Esther asked if we could have a period packing party at our meeting.

Focus on public safety in Brattleboro?

Kellie asked about using some funds to promote on social media.

8. VCW values/principles process

Cary shared an overview of the process VCW has gone through to establish a draft of VCW values and asked the group to review them.

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The group discussed:

- How these are applicable in the ways we work with each other/internally and also how we do our work.
- Representation as a key element of equity
- Including religion in equity
- Geographic equity
- Replacing women with Vermonters or people of all genders or something else that communicates that we want to include everyone
 - This might be also a bigger conversation about who we are
- The word respect is so culturally construed. What does it mean? In Vermont, there is a very white/New England presentation and expectation of “respect”.

Kellie suggested that Commissioners provide feedback to Cary and a standup Committee work to wordsmith this and incorporate feedback and bring it back to the Commission.

Meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.