

State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
126 State Street
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Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting minutes

Friday, April 19, 2024 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Vermont Department of Health, Community Room
324 Main Street, Bennington VT
And virtually

Commissioners present: Co-Chair Esther Charlestin, Co-Chair Sarah Mell, Hazel Brewster, Brenda Churchill, Nancy Kaplan, Ashley Messier, Sophia Rabe, and Susan Sussman

Commissioners absent: Heather Bouchey, Kellie Campbell, Alex Hilliard, Wendy Knight, Annie Mackin, Kelly-Rue Riso, Linda Joy Sullivan

Advisors present: Logan Snow of PPNNE

Staff: Cary Brown and Ellie Lane

Presiding: Co-Chairs Esther Charlestin and Sarah Mell

Recording: Ellie Lane

1. Meeting called to order

Meeting called to order at **10:11 a.m.**

2. Approval of agenda and review Group Agreements

MOTION made by Nancy, seconded by Susan

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

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

Review Group Agreements

3. Approval of March 15, 2024 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Brenda, seconded by Nancy

To approve the March 2024 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes adopted.

4. Welcome & Introductions

If your life was a movie and you were a director, what would you like to make happen in the next scene?

5. Committee Updates

Health Equity Committee

The Committee has been working on period product equity connections.

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They talked about having Outright Vermont, VT Network, Betsy Hassan, and Planned Parenthood coming to talk about policy language for reproductive health and making sure we are aligned with our partners as they work to update VCW's policy on reproductive health.

Logan talked about the period kits that ACT Bennington is leading and where folks can get them.

Housing and caregiving

The committee discussed getting to more communities to discuss housing, including in the northeast kingdom.

Workplace Equity Committee

The workplace equity committee has not met.

6. Values-Setting

Cary invited Commissioners to help with word-smithing the values we worked on before, if we don't get takers to work on that next month staff will work on that.

The group discussed the most recent draft, and whether the 5 overarching values we decided on - Equity, Communication, Partnership, Liberation, and Authenticity - remain the right ones.

- We could be closer to plain language.
- Is liberation the right word?
- What does authenticity mean?
- Is this language welcoming, especially when thinking about political diversity?
- Suggestion to run this through an AI filter for reading level.
- Suggestion to recreate this as statements rather than categories.

7. Staff/commissioner/advisor updates

Cary updated Commissioners about the hiring process for the Communications & Outreach Coordinator.

PR 4 passed out of Senate Judiciary and is on the Senate Floor today.

Cary submitted a memo on H.704, which would require compensation disclosure in job advertisements, addressing questions in the Senate Economic Development Committee and is hoping they will take it up.

We've been invited to testify in Senate Judiciary, regarding the women's replacement facility.

We've had one meeting on updating the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont handbook, and we're thinking about what that looks like in 2024.

The Brattleboro public forum is upcoming in May. The group discussed who we might invite specifically and how we might refine our communications about the event.

Susan shared that Meg Smith shared with her that there may be money available to update Change The Story data. Cary will talk with her about that.

8. Public Forum

Guests included: Andrea Bacchi, Emma Crowell, Alyssa Irizarry, Tina Cook, Kathy Clark, Sue Raggo, Victoria Silsby, Laura Farrington, Rebecca King, Lindsey Brillon, Dare Chamings, Emma Crowell, Beth Wallace, Judy Murphy

Sarah talked about VCW and our work and opened the floor to hear from folks about what is working and not working in the Bennington Community. Some thoughts shared included:

- Housing resources aren't working for survivors. There are unnecessary barriers for survivors. Survivors trying to leave unsafe situations aren't highly prioritized in accessing resources through coordinated entry.
- Lack of medical care access.
- Need for more training programs, including mentoring.
- Lack of access to legal services.
- Bennington gets forgotten in Montpelier.
- What's working is that Southwestern Hospital is getting an internal medicine doctor program launched.
- It can be hard to coordinate between Northshire and Southshire.
- There is a need for more continued dialogue.
- Peter Welch took over the Women's Economic Opportunity Conference happening on June 8.
- There are many passionate advocates and amazing work happening in Bennington.
- What are the plans and goals of the Commission? Communication is important. How do we create change?
- There are long waitlists for mental health services.
- Child care is a barrier for people, including for folks wanting to attend this forum.
- Need for pay equity and benefits for child care providers.
- Bennington has an amazing spirit of collaboration.
- Feel isolated and in their own corner of the state. Virtual opportunities have helped. Is there a Commissioner from Bennington?
- A feeling of lack of support and prioritization for adults without minor children.
- Could VCW play a role in gathering county-specific data to support efforts to get funding and services?
- Lack of support for small businesses, such as grants.
- Freelancers need more rights and support for health care.

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- Concerns about services being exclusionary.
- Need mentoring programs for BIPOC children, maybe programs to attract more BIPOC teachers and youth-serving professionals.
- Shared This Way Up, from Vermont Women's Fund.
- We need a VCW Commissioner from Bennington.
- Happy to see the way that the state is including women in legislation, but there aren't always enough services for folks.
- Planned Parenthood closed in Bennington, which is devastating. They do still offer telehealth and folks can access medication abortions anywhere in the state by mail.
- Legislators do love hearing from constituents. They are incredibly accessible. Hearings are live on YouTube.
- Engaging men as allies is a critical component.

9. Closing

Sarah thanked folks for coming and sharing and encouraged people to remain in touch.

Meeting adjourned at 1:08 p.m.