

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 13th, 2018 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre, Vermont

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Mary Daly, Charlotte Dennett, Ruth Finn, Emilie Kornheiser, Melinda Moulton (by phone), Kim Nolan, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Senecal

Commissioners absent:

Gretchen Bailey, Deborah Bucknam, Kellie Campbell, Kerry Secrest

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA-Vermont
Margarite Adelman, Lesley Becker, and Katherine Voss, Burlington Women's International League For Peace and Freedom
Lyn Blackwell of League Of Women Voters Vermont
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids, by phone
Lisa Falcone and Ashley Michelle Fowler of Mercy Connections
Lucy Leriche of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
Matt Levin of Vermont Early Childhood Alliance
Alice Kitchel of Vermont Federation of Business & Professional Women
Auburn Watersong of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Mary Claire Carroll and Pat Heffernan of Women Business Owners' Network

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Call to order, Welcome and introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:37

Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. Advisory Council legislative and policy priorities discussion

Auburn Watersong, Policy Director, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Over half of homicides that happen in Vermont are domestic violence related, and 54% of those are committed by firearms. This demonstrates the direct connection between domestic violence homicides and firearms. Governor Scott has indicated knowledge and concern about this link. During the last legislative session, a law was passed that allows police to remove firearms at the scene of a domestic violence incident, such as after a 911 call. Currently, Vermont does not have a law that requires relinquishment of firearms if there is a relief from abuse order, and currently, judges on the bench don't even mention firearms at a final RFA hearing.

The Network is proposing that this be addressed in both civil and criminal statutes, so that law enforcement knows what to do and have the tools to remove firearms including to get a search warrant, etc.

A housing protection bill is also being proposed. It will take the federal Violence Against Women Act protections and expand them into state statute, ensuring that all renters have the same protections as those currently in public housing, including:

- The ability to get out of a rental agreement if they are not safe
- Non-discrimination
- Confidentiality
- The ability to change locks

They are also working on paid family leave and minimum wage.

Lucy Leriche, Vice President of Public Policy, PPNNE

Planned Parenthood is again working on an over-the-counter contraceptives bill. Last year, a bill was introduced to require insurance companies to cover over-the-counter oral contraceptives. The bill wasn't passed, but a study was commissioned by Senate Health to require insurance companies to submit a report in January about how they would implement this or explain why they can't. Vermont has codified certain Affordable Care Act protections, but the concern is that there is an application before the FDA for an over the counter progesterone only contraceptive pill. Once it's over the counter, folks currently taking this kind of contraceptive as a prescription which is now covered will have to pay out of pocket. This bill is proactive to ensure that women continue to receive contraceptives without cost-sharing.

Planned Parenthood is also looking at a person's right to an abortion; they are very concerned this right is on the line at the federal level. There are no less than 20 cases nationally that could make their way to the Supreme Court. There is a conscious effort to get cases into the system to challenge Roe v. Wade. Planned Parenthood expects erosions of the right to choose at a minimum, if not a complete overruling. If that happens, then the decision to allow abortion access will get thrown back to the states. They are reviewing this situation, it's high on their radar, and they expect the legislature to be interested in this issue.

They are also working on paid family leave and minimum wage.

Pat Heffernan & Mary Claire Carroll, Co-Chairs of Public Policy Committee, Women Business Owners' Network (WBON)

In the past few years, WBON has been re-engaging in public policy. They are members of the Minimum Wage and Paid Family and Medical Leave coalitions, and work closely with Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility. They believe that a new paid family leave bill should include temporary disability insurance (TDI) administered by the state, and paid for by an employer/employee equal tax. The program should be administered by the Vermont Department of Labor, similar to unemployment insurance. They would like to support the Commission in getting updated data about how this could work.

Another issue WBON is paying attention to is how women-owned businesses are doing at accessing the revenue potential of State contracts, and would like to see the State improve the diversity of suppliers. There is a model law in the State of Washington; every department of state government is required to file a report detailing every contract they've entered once a year and then that's transparent and publicly available.

They would like to enhance the Vermont Secretary of State's one-stop business portal established by statute last year which also required the formation of a committee, currently taking public comments. WBON is encouraging that committee to consider the specific needs of start-ups and expanding small businesses. They would like the Secretary of State to include data collection about gender and the kinds of goods and services offered. It would help both government and small businesses located each other.

Opportunity Zones were a part of the federal tax bill that gave each state a number of zones they can designate, Vermont has 25. Each of these zones can access a specific funding stream. There are a group of folks who are learning more and are concerned that the opportunity zones will follow the pattern of being dominated by big developers. WBON is interested in supporting the establishment of a statewide opportunity fund that could have in its designation community and eco considerations.

Co-ops are an effective way to establish women-owned businesses. Look at Vermont's co-op law and see if it can be made more accessible.

Lyn Blackwell, League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters supports paid family and medical leave, raising the minimum wage, Lake Champlain cleanup, and they are also taking the lead on the Vermont Women's Suffrage Centennial Celebration with the help of VCW. August 2020 is the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. They would like to bring together as many people who would like to participate in planning a series of events that not only commemorate what happened but also to educate, especially young people. Please reach out to Lyn if you're interested in joining the committee.

There has also been an effort to introduce a constitutional amendment in Vermont for what was previously the ERA but will take on a more inclusive form.

Marguerite Adelman, Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF)

WILPF is interested in peace efforts and anti-militarism. The United Nations passed a resolution to ban nuclear weapons, which has been signed by a number of countries; ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. The U.S. has refused to sign, but they are working on cities and states passing resolutions calling on the federal government to sign. WILPF is hoping Vermont will also pass a resolution in support. WILPF is also in support of minimum wage, the ERA, and universal healthcare.

Meredith Roberts, Executive Director, American Nurses Association

There are an inadequate number of family physicians and nurses in Vermont. Over 75% of nurses are abused at work, and nurses are more likely to be attacked than prison guards and police officers. One in three women and one in six men are sexually assaulted in their lifetimes; we need more SANE nurses. Nurse educators are paid inadequately compared to what can be earned in hospital settings to the tune of \$30 – 60k per year. Traveling nurses are subject to their home state discipline and local boards don't

always even know they are here. Almost a third of VT prison population get MAT on any given day. Prohibiting overtime over a certain number of hours is also an issue they are looking at.

Alice Kitchel, Vermont Federation of Business & Professional Women (BPW)

She is concerned about Kiah Morris and the harassment and racism she was subjected to. The Vermont Attorney General is looking at this now. Don't want this to slip out of public view.

Jen Horwitz, Policy & Research Director, Let's Grow Kids

Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) is a key issue; they are working with partners to make sure that Vermont puts the resources in place to make sure families with young children can balance their needs. They are also working with the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance and other groups in tandem on this issue. Key issues related to the CCFAP include increasing affordability, expanding eligibility, and increasing reimbursement rates for programs. The program hasn't kept pace with rising costs, so even for families who qualify for 100% tuition reimbursement, there is a gap that childcare providers either have to make up or ask a family that can't afford to pay the difference because the amount the state reimburses doesn't cover the cost of the care.

Engaging employers and supporting employer contributions to Vermont's early care and learning system is an issue they are working on this year.

Supporting Vermont's Early Educators through programs like student loan forgiveness, scholarship programs, TEACH, and wage parity is also a focus, with goals of increased recruitment and retention.

Matt Levin, Executive Director, Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance (VECAA)

VECAA is a coalition that focuses on families with kids 0-8. Voices for Vermont's Children will be leading an effort to create an ombudsperson for children, as well as expanding medical payments for doulas.

The Alliance sets an annual legislative agenda by consensus, this year it includes:

1. Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (FaMLI) – Will be starting over this year, and there will be efforts to include Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) again.
2. Minimum Wage increase – VECAA is focused on any impact on CCFAP and other benefits and ensuring folks don't lose more benefits than they gain in increased wages.
3. Housing-related issues - Lead by VT Affordable Housing Coalition. Critical for women with young families as well.
4. Increased expenditures on Children's Integrated Services (CIS), CCFAP, Farm to School program, Parent-Child Centers, etc.
5. Increase funding for Reach Up - Voices for Vermont's Children is leading this effort.

3. Approval of October 2018 Meeting Minutes

Approval of October 2018 Minutes

MOTION made by **Carol**, seconded by **Ruth**:

To approve the October 2018 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.

4. VCW Policy Updates

Family Law Matters Policy distributed at the last meeting; now up for approval.

ADOPTION of Family Law Matters Public Policy

MOTION made by **Carol**, seconded by **Ruth**:

To adopt the Family Law Matters policy as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.

5. Staff updates and discussion of Commission activities

Cary briefly updated the Commission about the status of our budget development for FY20.

The Sunset Advisory Commission is reviewing VCW. Cary is testifying on Nov. 27th, and she passed around a list of the questions that will be asked.

The Legislative Lunch fundraising Committee reported raising about \$3400 so far.

VCW staff is almost ready to put out RFPs for our H.707 Sexual Harassment project. One key component of the program will be a one-stop website. The others will be a marketing campaign and resource development. The work will not be specific to the workplace, we want to address schools, workplaces, and other situations. We expect a strong focus on culture change in addition to legal obligations.

Campaign for Vermont has a new director and is asking organizations to sign onto a letter about workforce development legislation; Cary may bring this to the Commission in December.

The Commission discussed our Listening Project. Hannah has been applying tags to open-ended questions, and we could use a small group of volunteers. We'll be issuing recommendations, let's be thinking about that process for our meeting in December.

The New England Women Policy Initiative conference is Friday; the staff, Lisa, and Marcia are going.

6. Announcements

Mercy Connections' Mercy Marketplace is happening on December 8th from 11:00 – 3:00 at Main Street Landing where participant vendors are selling their wares. High-quality offerings will include jewelry, pottery, and more.

15 Week Comprehensive Business Planning Class starts in January and is going into its 30th year.

Vermont Women's Mentoring Training Program coming up which trains folks to mentor incarcerated and recently released women.

Vermont Leadership Training starts in January – a civic engagement training takes participants through ways to engage with the system.

Mary Daly looks at people's grocery baskets at the grocery store and cringes. Home economics would be very valuable to folks. She thinks that we need to look at health a little bit somewhere along the way and help mothers and women who are responsible for feeding other people. People don't understand what they are doing to themselves by eating processed foods.

Emilie discussed an ongoing interest in creating a fund to put more pictures of women in the State House. We already have a list of appropriate subjects for paintings. A suggestion was made to discuss this with the Friends of the Statehouse, and Matt Levin offered to participate in that discussion.

Lisa is selling raffle tickets for Clarina Howard Nichols.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:30 p.m.