

**Vermont Commission on Women  
Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, December 14th, 2016

Pavilion Office Building, 4th Floor Conference Room, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT

**Commissioners present:**

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Ruth Finn, Melinda Moulton, Kerry Secrest

**Commissioners absent:**

Lynn Batchelor, Charlotte Dennett, Laine Dunham, Cathy Frey, Jennie Gartner, Susie Hudson, Nancy LaVarnway, Danielle Martel, Colin Ryan

**Advisors present:**

Kim Swartz of Maternal & Child Health Division Vermont Department of Health  
Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office  
Wendy Rice of Vermont Works for Women  
Laura Lind-Blum of Women Business Owners' Network

**Guests:** Dallas Elgin, Ph.D., James Moore, Ph.D., Sandeep Shetty (by phone), Jeff Hayes with IWPR (by phone), Tiffany Bluemle, Pat Heffernan

**Staff:** Cary Brown, Hannah Myers, Lilly Talbert

**Presiding:** Marcia Merrill

**Recording:** Hannah Myers

**Meeting called to order at 9:31 a.m.**

**Welcome/Introductions:** Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

**Presentation on results of Vermont Paid Family & Medical Leave Feasibility Study**

James Moore, Vice-President, Labor, IMPAQ International  
Dallas Elgin, Research Associate, IMPAQ International

Commissioners offered comments:

- this is an equity issue for low-wage workers, who can't afford to take leave at 60 or 66% pay, especially with a new baby
- Questions were raised about the tax implications of benefits
- suggested edits for clarity include to replace "business" with "employer", to include demographics, and to clarify the use of "short term leave" by using the HR terms of the day

### **Presentation on Change the Story VT report “Women’s Business Ownership and the Vermont Economy”**

Tiff Bluemle, Director, Change the Story VT  
Pat Heffernan  
Laura Lind-Blum

Commissioners asked questions and offered comments:

- how to engage bankers, venture capitalists, etc.
- we need data to understand exactly what it happening
- we need primary research in VT so we can debunk common myths, such as that women don’t know how to create good business plans
- Presenters explained the compounding inequity over time. Women earn lower wages, which lead to higher debt loads and lower credit ratings which leads to lower equity to invest in a business which leads to lower revenue and further capital acquisition barriers.
- Nationally, the women’s small business center data shows significant return on investment. We don’t have the data on loans.
- challenge is that this will go nowhere unless a much bigger group of people are getting the information out. The purpose of Change The Story is to serve as a catalyst, not to do the work. We need to get people engaged. Tiff would love for thoughts about where the opportunities are for all of us to present this data and get it out there. Opinion Editorials, and other avenues are helpful.

### **Legislative Lunch Planning**

Hannah requested help from Commissioners by calling legislators and informing them about the Commission’s work and to urge their attendance at the lunch. She has divided up the list of legislators and given a list to each Commissioner. Commissioners not in attendance will receive their requests in the mail.

### **Generative Thinking discussion re: meeting structure, timing, outcomes, etc.**

Marcia led the group in a Generative Thinking discussion around the meeting practices. Some of the points raised included:

- would like to hear from Commissioners whether we should consider meeting length, location, and/or frequency changes. What are we doing with our meetings, are we maximizing our expertise?
- move to a system where we are utilizing our expertise to put out findings and recommendations.
- there are people who would love to be here but can’t be here, but that having monthly meetings is important.
- the intense time and financial commitment required to be in attendance, and that creates a barrier for participants.

- Maybe a meeting every other month, and more phone/committee work in between would help maximize resources.
- Video conferencing is expensive, but the mileage is too.
- a survey of Commissioners would be important to solicit feedback from Commissioners unable to attend.
- More travel around the state for meetings would be helpful, in the past we had listening forums in other parts of the state.
- Meeting in Montpelier feels important for our visibility.
- The visibility of the Commission is really important.
- When there is a substantive presentation about projects or legislation that we make some decision. Our time should be spent on substantive issues.
- enjoys these meetings and the presentations, it helps inform her work.
- Maybe there is a way to stay in contact throughout the month.
- more notice about the meeting topics would be helpful to come prepared.
- likes meeting once a month.
- suggested we could include or invite legislative committee members to our meetings. They could learn and gain new perspective.
- employer gives time to come, and if the meetings were later, that would be a problem.
- Technology might support advisors with attendance.
- We could survey advisors about their attendance, whether our meetings are helpful, timing etc.
- likes getting written staff updates.
- Commissioners need to come to meetings prepared and read the materials provided in advance.
- Has found meetings content rich, valuable, and interesting.
- would like guidance about what she can do with that information that will help
- would like the meetings to have some built-in time for action planning.
- Marcia requested brief weekly staff updates to Commissioners by e-mail, with a clear subject like "Staff Update".

Meeting adjourned at **12:31 p.m.**