

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting agenda

February 11, 2022 | 8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | ONLINE meeting – contact VCW for access information
 (VCW staff will attend the meeting from the VCW offices to provide physical access, but the meeting will work best when attended online)

TIME	AGENDA ITEM	WHO	OUTCOMES
8:30 – 8:40	1. Welcome and introductions	Lisa	✓ Welcome & intros
8:40	2. Approve minutes of January 14, 2022	Lisa	✓ VOTE on approving minutes
8:40 – 8:45	3. Announcements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional and personal announcements 	Lisa	✓ Share information
8:45 – 9:00	4. Committee work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates from committees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Equity & Security Women in the Criminal Legal System Discussion of racial justice work 	Cary	✓ Share information from committees ✓ VOTE on child marriage policy
9:00 – 9:05	5. VCW principles/values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuation of planning process 	Kellie	✓ Discuss draft principles/values
9:05 – 9:30	6. VT National Guard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GUEST: Selena Correa 		✓ Share information
9:30 – 9:35	BREAK		
9:35 – 10:15	7. Vermont Parent Child Representation Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GUEST: Corey Wood, VPCRC GUEST: Larry Crist, VPCRC Letter from Bill Young, former VCW Commissioner, appended to the agenda Additional materials provided by VPCRC, sent separately 	Cary	✓ Share information
10:15 – 10:30	8. Staff updates	Cary/Lilly/ Ellie	✓ Share information

February 9, 2022

To the Members of the Vermont Commission on Women:

I understand that you will be speaking tomorrow with Mr. Larry Crist of the Vermont Parent Representation Center. I would like to provide you with a comment on the issues he is concerned about.

First, since I don't think I have met any of you, with the exception of Ed Adrian, let me introduce myself. I was a member of the then Governor's Commission on the Status of Women from 1983-1985, appointed because of my interest in issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and child sexual abuse. I had to resign when I was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS, the predecessor agency to DCF). As Commissioner, for 18 years, I oversaw the establishment of the first state wide comprehensive response to child sexual abuse in the U.S., as well as an increase in Vermont's commitment to child care from \$1.5 million to about \$28 million. I have been retired for about 7 years.

Larry Crist is advocating for changes in Vermont government to address systemic mistakes and outright abuses in our child protection system that are harming, at the least, hundreds of families every year. The stories, and there are hundreds of them, are a worse abuse of power than I could ever imagine. They are unbelievable! And that is why I am writing you. Believe them.

Larry worked for me at SRS as the Director of our Licensing Division. I found him to be a hard-working, competent, honest and caring man. Four years ago he contacted me to discuss what he was finding as Executive Director of the Vermont Parent Representation Center. When he described what he was finding my response was to say, "Larry, this sounds terrible, but I don't believe it. Prove it." He responded with "All right, I will." And over a period of about 2 months of written material, phone calls, emails, meetings and review of cases, he did prove to my satisfaction and dismay that these accounts are true and they continue.

The stories go on and on. Many of the parents are poor. Many have other problems and difficulties. Many are single mothers:

- Instances of DCF workers coercing parents into signing "Voluntary Custody" agreements that remove their children without judicial review
- Social workers providing Judges with skewed and misleading information or outright lies to support false findings of abuse and neglect and child custody.
- Appeals officials having secret communications with DCF staff unknown to the parents who are in the process of appealing findings of abuse and neglect.
- A system of legal representation of both children and their parents in child protection cases that, with a few notable exceptions, is appallingly incompetent and worse than useless.
- Cases where investigations were never performed but children were removed
- Cases where competent relatives were available to care for a child but DCF never contacted them as required by Federal and DCF policy.
- Increasing incidents more recently, often involving single mothers, where the parents have struggled for years to get services for a child who is severely emotionally disturbed or struggling with mental illness and DCF labels the parent as abusive or neglectful, takes the child into custody, ceases medications previously ordered, botches casework and

ultimately returns the child to a parent who now is in the abuse/neglect registry and is ineligible for a large percentage of jobs in Vermont.

No one in Government seems interested in dealing with these issues: Not DCF Commissioners, Secretaries of Human Services, the Governor, legislators, the Attorney General or the leadership of the Judiciary and the Defender General. It reminds me of a time in our state when the only people speaking out about domestic violence, sexual assault and child sexual abuse were a small group of women who were ignored and labeled “hysterical”. But time, determination and a will to never give up proved that they were right and, eventually progress began to be made.

So I am writing to encourage you to take Larry Crist seriously, to understand that the issues he raises are of the utmost importance to a large number of Vermont families and cost the State millions in unnecessary spending and to consider what actions the Commission can take to support change. And if you don’t believe it, tell him to “Prove it” and take a little time to do that. If an old codger like me can do that, you can. Silence is the friend of evil. It is the friend of abuses of power.

Thank you for considering my remarks. I wish you all well.

Respectfully,

Bill Young

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And

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