

State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
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Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes
Friday, January 13, 2023 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Pavilion Building, 4th floor conference room, 109 State St, Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Kiah Morris (Co-chair), Lisa Senecal (Co-chair), Hazel Brewster, Esther Charlestin, Brenda Churchill, Alex Hilliard, Nancy Kaplan, Wendy Knight (remotely), Sarah Mell (remotely), Heidi Tringe (remotely)

Commissioners absent:

Annie Mackin, Ashley Messier, Kim Nolan

Advisors present:

Michelle Fey, Voices for Vermont's Children (remotely)
Jillian Scannell, Vermont Works for Women (remotely)
Jessica Barquist, Vermont Network
Katie Salina, LGK (remotely)
Betsy Hassan, ANA-Vermont (remotely)
Amy Rose, Voices for Vermont's Children (remotely)

Guests:

Staff: Cary Brown, Ellie Lane
Presiding: Kiah Morris
Recording: Ellie Lane

1. Meeting Called to Order

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

2. Approval of Meeting Agenda

Motion made by Nancy, seconded by Lisa.
To approve the meeting agenda as submitted.
Unanimously approved.

3. Review Group Agreements

The group took a minute to review the group agreements.

4. Approval of meeting minutes of December 2022

Motion made by Hazel, seconded by Nancy.
To approve the December 2022 meeting minutes as submitted.
Esther and Brenda abstained. Unanimously approved.

5. Introductions

Kiah asked the group to share a little bit about themselves and what brought us to the work.

6. Updates and announcements

Kiah shared that RAD is working on a bill to create a liveable wage standard for legislators and child care for legislators, potentially going through the rules committee. Maybe Mamava could be in the State House. There is also a rule against children on the floor.

Kiah shared about the documentary she is featured in, *Backlash*, State House, February 7, 6:30 pm, which will be free and followed by a panel discussion. The Network is the community partner and is working on offering aftercare.

7. Legislative updates from partners

- Michelle Fay, Voices for Vermont's Children

Michelle gave an overview of the Paid Family Medical Leave Coalition and the current status of the efforts to pass a universal and equitable paid family medical leave insurance program. Highlights of the current bill include 100% wage replacement up to a cap, the program will be funded by a payroll tax, and that earners who make less than \$25,000 annually will have their contributions refunded.

Heidi asked about the Governor's voluntary plan he announced and wondered what the conversation has been about that. Michelle shared that his plan includes a low wage replacement, stakeholders are concerned about the public administration of a public good, the family definition isn't as inclusive, six weeks isn't long enough for new parents, and there is concern that the program benefits being inadequate can disincentivize male partners from taking leave to bond with new children.

- Bor Yang, Human Rights Commission

Bor shared a few priorities of the Human Rights Commission, including:

- "Don't darken my door" – When people file claims of discrimination and harassment, this bill would prohibit settlement agreements from containing no re-hire clauses. Part of the concern is when people work for large employers, we are essentially kicking them out of the state. This protection already exists in cases of sexual harassment and should apply to all harassment and discrimination cases.
- Expansion of equal pay laws to include race, national origin, and disability. It's important that other groups have equal pay protections because they are handled differently and claimants don't need to prove intentional discrimination, only the pay differential.
- Changing the legal standard for the way we look at harassment in discrimination cases. Currently, the legal standard is severe or pervasive. The problem is the courts have interpreted this to be a very high bar. There have been many people who have lost claims when they were touched, stalked, etc. The bill would change that standard across the board. Last year, we passed that in housing, but couldn't get it passed for employment and places of

accommodations. This bill is controversial and needs a lot of diverse stakeholders to support it to combat the powerful opposition.

Bor explained that courts struggle with evaluating claims when someone belongs to several protected classes. Courts look at them as three separate classes, but don't review them collectively. Bor shared an example of how this has worked under the new standard in housing law, and how that changed the circumstances for housing discrimination claims.

A question was asked about the equal pay law, and whether sex includes gender identity in pay discrimination cases. Bor explained that the courts have interpreted sex to include sexual identity and sexual orientation.

- Jessica Barquist, VT Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

Jessica shared the Network's legislative agenda, including:

- Addressing abusive litigation
- Adding coercive control to the relief of abuse order statute
- Prohibiting persons subject to final protection orders from possessing firearms
- Expanding restorative justice options for victims
- Addressing survivor needs in human trafficking statutes'
- Changing the legal standards for harassment and discrimination
- Campus sexual violence response and prevention
 - Immunity for conduct violations for victim/survivors
 - Having a confidential advocate outside of Title IX, having MOUs with local programs in the area, training for students every year, and data collection through a statewide campus climate survey.

- Amy Rose, Voices for Vermont's Children

Amy shared an update about the Office of Child and Youth Advocate. The oversight committee has been formed and met. The Governor has received candidates, whom he will choose from.

Amy mentioned a universal basic income pilot program for youth transitioning out of foster care.

She shared that last year, the Reach Up policy language was changed with the engagement requirements being broader and strength-based, these new rules go into effect this year. However, DCF has already begun implementing changes and the sanctions on program participants have gone way down because of the new approach, from 10% of participants to 0.1%.

This year, there are proposals to increase the grant by eliminating the ratable reduction, and also look at the basic needs standard and the housing stipends and how those are calculated and whether they are meeting people's needs. Amy explained that the rateable reduction is a carve-out and that the state is allowed to reduce

the grants based on the money available. How we determine what funds are available is confusing. For example this year, the budget adjustment bill includes surplus funds being distributed, but funds aren't being funneled to the Reach Up program to meet the statutory requirements.

The Commission asked advisors to let us know if there are specific ways that VCW can support them.

8. Staff Updates

Cary updated the Commission about the hiring process, our budget, staff reclassification, and the CRCF legislative briefing last week.

9. Racial Equity Work

Shalini Suryanaryana with the Office of Racial Equity offered training on responding to harm.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:32 pm.